

Where is your
HEART

V O L U M E 1

J O S E P H A . C O R T E S

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Where Is Your Heart

This is the first of many messages that I will be teaching about giving. To most, giving to the Lord in the correct way is a sensitive subject. Too many Christians today are at a loss on this subject. Now some of you are very knowledgeable about this subject and for you this will be just a reminder, but some of you have never heard anyone preach on Matthew 6 verse 19 through 24. Unfortunately, most preachers take these scriptures out of context and do not apply them to the subject matter that Jesus was addressing; possessions and money. This is a hard subject to preach on, not because I think it is difficult, but because it can hit a sensitive nerve.

I do not believe there is a formula for giving in the New Testament that you should follow. Many preachers teach that you should give 10% of your income. I believe it is more than tithing 10% as instructed in the Old Testament. I am convinced that God's word and the spreading of it should be more important to us than anything else that this world has to offer. Furthermore, when you know how to give properly, you are looking for the next opportunity to participate in spreading His good news of the gospel with your sweet smell offering that is well pleasing to Him.

Too many Christians think they are doing enough by just giving as little money as possible to God and His church or ministry. God has a different view on this subject, so let us begin by going to Matthew 6:19. ***“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal.”*** It is important for you to stop and learn what God's word says about money and possessions, and how to give to His ministries and to His churches properly, which is without any strings attached. In addition, too many people give with the condition that they need to know where the money is going and how it is distributed. Money is not yours to begin with; it is God's possession. When you give to a church or ministry, you should not ask, “Where is this particular ministry going to spend the money that I give?” Please, do not ask me this question. Paul, in his letter to Timothy says, ***“Someone who preaches the Lord's word is worth double honor.”***

Giving is an act of worship that has become optional because of lack luster preachers who are too afraid to address the true message of giving. These preachers are fearful that their congregation will leave and go someplace that does not require the correct way of giving.

I warned you before I started preaching tonight that this would be a sensitive subject, because money always is. The Bible says that the love of money is the root of all evil, because it affects your heart. It hardens your heart if you allow it. The four Gospels alone mention money 348 times. It is mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew 109 times, in Mark 57 times, 94 times in Luke, and in John 88 times. That does not even include where money is mentioned in the rest of the New Testament.

Matthew 6:19 says, ***“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal.”*** Circle the word *treasures*. The Greek word for this is *thesaurizo*. The best definition for *thesaurizo* is to heap up or accumulate riches. What the Lord is saying here is to not accumulate riches here on earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. However, store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal.

Most of us are pack rats and like to accumulate things. We hang on to our possessions because we are convinced that we might need them somewhere down the road. Christ always went to the heart of the matter. ***“Lay not treasures (thesaurizo, accumulated riches) up for yourselves.”*** Does that mean you cannot plan your retirement? Yes, you can. You know how much income you will need to retire. In the United States, we have Social Security. At about the age of thirty, we start getting letters informing us of an approximated amount that we might expect to receive when we retire. This gives a chance to plan investments, which should include giving to God, and every-day living expenses.

Do not be deceived by the false doctrine of “giving to get rich.” This is also another fad that teaches if you just re-sow your seed, God will bless you and benefit you, and you will become rich for Jesus. I pray all of you do become rich. However, there is **no** guarantee that giving will get you rich in the here and now. In theory it sounds good, but God sees the heart. He sees that most Christians that follow this type of teaching (giving to get rich) will only do this for a short period to see if He will make them rich. However, God sees the heart. He knows what you have been taught and how you react to it.

Then there are other preachers proudly proclaiming that they will not ask for money to keep their program on the air. I analyzed that statement and found how idiotic it is to rob listeners of the opportunity of keeping His word front and center in the world via television and radio programs through giving. If you want to continue hearing the word of God, it does not come free. There is a cost. There is no greater privilege than to keep a program with the message that changed your life on the air.

Therefore, you go from one extreme that tells you to “give to get rich,” and another that has too much pride to ask for money from people who have received the gospel of Jesus Christ and learned to walk a life of faith. The Philippians anxiously waited for the opportunity to give to Paul no matter where he was or what he was doing. Giving is an act of worship that pleases God, just like faith.

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth”; do not accumulate riches here on earth.

Jesus says we are to accumulate them in heaven. By now, you might be asking where heaven's bank account is. The answer is simple: churches, ministries, and storehouses that preach and teach the word of God. Not every preacher you listen to falls into those categories. In Matthew chapter 7, Jesus talks about people who came in his name, but he said to them, "**I never knew you.**" Likewise, to some of today's ministries Jesus is going to say, "**I never knew you.**" That is why you need to get involved with ministries that stay focused on the word of God. You need to get involved with ministries that you can give to so you can lay up your treasures in heaven; your accumulated riches. I was just thinking earlier today what a wonderful feeling it will be when you meet someone in heaven that actually can say to you, "I am here because the offering you gave to the Lord made it possible for me to hear His word." That is a true treasure. Some of you Christians need to stop living for yourselves and start living for eternity. What you have to understand is that we all have the responsibility to send God's message of grace and faith out to the ones that have not heard it.

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." The Greek word for heart is *kardia*. *Kardia* is the center and seat of spiritual life. "***For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also***", meaning the center and seat of your spiritual life. If your heart is here on earth, your whole focus will be on things of this earth. However, if your heart is with Jesus, and your treasure is in heaven, then your whole focus will be on sending forth the message, either as a deliverer or participating with the one delivering the message. Either you are preaching the word, or you are supporting someone that does.

Where is your center? Is it here on earth or is it in heaven? How many of you awoke this morning and asked yourself what extra you could do to get the message that changed your life out to the rest of the world? Well, if you are anything like me, you are just thankful that you made it through the night. However, go beyond that. Thank Him for the privilege of putting you in a position to get one more person to listen to the same word that has changed your life. That is what He was trying to do with Peter in John 21:16 when He says, "***Feed my sheep***". Do not go back to your old ways. Do not go back to being a fisherman. Instead, feed my sheep. Fall in love with feeding my sheep. Even though you might be a follower, you still can fall in love with feeding His sheep. Like I said, what a wonderful feeling it will be when someone walks up to you in heaven and says, "You know what, I think you had something to do with me getting here. By your participation in getting the message out, I was able to hear the word of God." Where your heart is, your treasure will be also. Where is the center of your spiritual life? Is it here on earth or is it in heaven? However, Jesus does not want **all** of your money. It all belongs to him, but he does not want all of it. Jesus just wants to see your dedication to how much treasure you want to store in heaven for the purpose of His kingdom. Yes, you will be rewarded up there because of your participation down here.

Let us continue to verse 22 in Matthew 6. I have read many messages, books, and commentaries that ruin this verse because this verse is taken out of context. There are only a few commentaries I have come across that have caught the true meaning of what this scripture is saying. ***“The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.”*** Circle the word *single*. The Greek word is *haplous*, but the definition is not *“single.”* Remember, verse 19 to 21 and all of the verses after 22 are still talking about money. Why should Jesus in verse 22 divert to another subject? ***“The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be haplous, thy whole body shall be full of light.”*** The eye is the window by which light gets into the whole body. If the eye is clear, light is illuminated everywhere. The light would be hindered if it were frosted, colored, or dirty. The word *haplous* means that my whole body shall be full of light. I will not be in darkness. Matthew 6:23 goes on to read, ***“If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!”*** In other words, you are lost in the dark and cannot see the true meaning of anything; you are walking around in total darkness.

About the word *haplous*, James Montgomery Boice says, “There is another thought in this section. . .coming from the word in which the King James translator rendered *single*. . .and the New English founders rendered *sound*. . .In some texts, the word means *simple* and *simplicity*. . . However, other texts say the only proper translation is *generosity*. . . Some translators recognized the meaning was *“generosity”* when translating Romans 12 verse 8, for in that verse the word *simplicity* used in the King James Version was changed to *liberality* so that now the text reads: ‘He that *giveth*, let him do it with *liberality*.’” To define this in other words, we could say *very generously*. The Greek defines *haplous* as *“simplicity as manifested in generous giving.”* This verse refers to money. Not the incorrect nonsense a lot of authors and commentators like to tell you. This verse has always been about money and possessions and it has always been about how to give God’s way. Matthew 6:22 can now be read as, ***“The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be generous, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil (or not generous), thy whole body shall be full of darkness.”***

I looked in the Twenty-Six Translations Bible and was curious to see how many of the twenty-six translators would even want to deal with this particular verse. I only found two. The one translator that really stood out was Moffat. His translation is, ***“So if your eye were generous...”*** Why should it be generous? Because you are laying up your treasures in heaven, not here on earth. If you lay your treasures up here on earth, then you are in darkness. ***“If therefore the light that is in thee be dark, how great is that darkness!”*** In other words, the more reluctant you are to give and the harder you hang onto your possessions, the more darkness you will have. I am not saying you cannot plan for your future. I am not saying you cannot live your life. God allows you to have possessions, but he wants to see what your heart will do with them; how His word has changed your life and what it has meant to you. He is looking to see where your heart is by the way you generously give back to ministries and churches that feed you the word of

God. In addition, if you do it with the right attitude because your heart is seated and centered on His word that gives you spiritual life, then you will be living in the light that illuminates your whole body. However, if you are reluctant to give, do not give in a *haplous* manner (generously), then you are living in a life of darkness. I guarantee you, as you progress in years it will become darker and darker. Moreover, not even a little glimpse of light could penetrate you. Scratch out the word *single* and write in *haplous* or *generous*. ***“The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be generous, thy whole body shall be full of light.”*** Do you want to live in the light? Or do you want to live in darkness? This particular chapter is titled, ***“Where Is Your Heart?”*** Is your heart in the treasures in heaven or here on earth? Are you accumulating riches in heaven or here on earth? You can accumulate them in heaven by giving to the ministry that gives you light and hope through teaching the word of God. That has always been God’s plan.

Let us move on to verse 24 in Matthew 6. ***“No man can serve two masters.”*** *Kurios* is the Greek word for *masters*. It defines to whom you belong. ***“For either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.”*** In other words, you cannot serve God and your possessions and money; for you will hate the one and love the other. The Greek word for love is *agapao*. It is the giving of one’s self without conditions. This means that because you dearly love the object, you are not going to put any conditions on the object being loved. For either you will hate the one and love the other; or else you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Mammon.

You will have to make the choice. God will not make it for you. It is your choice. You will serve God or you will serve your possessions. That is why Jesus was so disappointed when the rich young ruler asked him what he must do to follow Jesus. Jesus’ response was, “Sell all you have, give it to the poor, and follow me.” Jesus saw his heart. He knew that the man would never follow Him. To follow Jesus meant he would have to leave his possessions behind. To follow Jesus would mean that he would have to put his total trust in Christ. However, Jesus saw his heart. He knew very well that the ruler would never give up his possessions. That is why Jesus gave him the ultimatum. Some of you need the same ultimatum.

Listen, I have been in the ministry for a long time. I have known people that had tens of thousands of dollars in their bank account, yet when the offering plate came by, they wrote a ten-dollar check. They had no desire to participate in any ministry, including the one they followed, in order to get the message that changed their lives out to others. I have listened to stories in the news about some parent, relative, or friend who gave up their kidney or another body part to save someone’s life. You have to have the same attitude in your approach to giving. It has to cost you something so God’s word can save someone else’s life. It is our responsibility to get the word to others. It takes money and it takes possessions. It is a giving of one’s self. In addition, once you figure out to whom you are going to give yourself to, God or Mammon, you will know if you

will be living in light or darkness. There is no exception to the rule. It has always been that way and it will be that way until He comes.

Let us look at what James Montgomery Boice says about the subject of God and Mammon. “***No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.***’ Nothing could be said more clearly, or be more obvious. It should be a heart-searching question for all Christians. . . Can anything be more insulting to God, Who let His Son redeem us from the slavery of sin, put us in Christ, and given us all things to enjoy than to take the name of our God upon us, to be called by His name, and then to demonstrate by every action and every decision of life that we actually serve money?”

I am telling you that many Christians are at this point in their lives. They have such a grip on their possessions and that there is no way they can release it. In addition, some of them have developed the habit of saying they do not know if they can trust *that* ministry, or if they can trust *that* church with God’s money. These are concerns because God is looking at your heart and your attitude toward what His word tells you to do. If it is a corrupt ministry that you are following, and you do not even know it, God still sees your heart. Is the offering “***a sweet smell sacrifice . . . acceptable, well pleasing to God,***” as seen in Philippians 4:18? Or is it something done out of a sense of obligation? Some of you are always looking a formula for tithing and that is why some of you follow the tithing program. Outside that one statement that Paul made to the Philippians, there is no reference to tithing, because it is more than a tithe in the New Testament. Either you are all in or you are all out.

I am sure currently you are wondering if you have to give up everything that you have. Most of you will never be put in that position, but your hearts better have that attitude. We all need to fall in love with giving to God the right way, because you can never accumulate too many riches in heaven. So, go ahead and plan for your retirement, or you may want to leave some money to your children. But the best thing you could leave your children is a Bible or notebook full of notes about how God’s word changed your life. I guarantee if you leave that to them and they follow that path, Christ will see them through. Or else when Christ said in Matthew 6:25, “***Take no thought for your life. . .***” through to the end of chapter 6 is false. Because if you do not take any thought for your life, then why would you put your children in a position where they do not have to lean on God? You are doing an injustice to them because you want to feel good. You may think that sounds too harsh, but are you living for the Father or are you living for yourself? You are responsible for your children, you are to take care of them; but most of you will retire and die when your children are adults. Let them learn to lean on God just as you did. The best thing you could ever leave them is your library of notes on how faith in His word saw you through. What a legacy of faith you are leaving behind. What a great source of help you are leaving for them.

Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones tells the story of a farmer who one day told his wife of his joy because his best cow had given birth to twin calves, one red and one white.

He said, "You know, I have been led of the Lord to dedicate one of the calves to Him. We will raise them together and when it comes time to sell them, we will keep the proceeds that come from one calf and give the proceeds that come from the other calf to the Lord's work."

When his wife asked which calf he would dedicate to the Lord, he answered there was no need to decide that then.

"We will treat them both in the same way and when that time comes, we will sell them as I have said."

Several months later, the man entered the kitchen looking sad and miserable. When his wife asked what was troubling him, he said, "I have bad news for you, the Lord's calf is dead."

However, his wife replied, "You had not yet decided which was yet to be the Lord's calf."

"Oh yes," he said, "I had always determined that it was to be the white one, and it is the white calf that has died."

Strangely, it is always the Lord's calf that dies. That farmer was living in darkness. He never saw the true light of generosity in giving to God. He was living in darkness by attaching the conditions that **IF** God blessed him with a good calf and he could sell it and make a good profit, **THEN** he would give that calf's proceeds to the Lord. However, **IF** that calf died, the proceeds of the calf that lived would never be put to use in the Lord's work. This is conditional giving by telling God, "If you do for me God, then I will do for you." Some may think that is what Jacob said to God in the Old Testament, but that is not exactly what happened. I will get to Jacob in future chapters; however, **this** farmer was living in darkness. Always the Lord's calf dies unless we are clear about the true nature of our possessions. Who owns your possessions? The Lord Jesus Christ says that God owns them and you serve Him, or else your possessions own you and you serve them. That farmer was living in darkness. He could never have seen the light, he could never have been illuminated, and the light would never have penetrated his whole body. ***"The light of the body is the eye, if therefore thine eye be haplous, thy whole body shall be full of light."*** What kind of light, you ask? The illuminating light only the Lord can give. You serve God or you serve Mammon, the choice is yours.

Let us go to 1 John, chapter 2, verse 15. I have discussed this before but it is worth revisiting. ***"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world*** (in other words, love not the world or the treasures that are in the world). ***If any man love*** (the treasures of) ***the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*** Why is the love of the Father not in him? Because he is not illuminated with the light of generous giving. His love is for the things of this world. How much more clearly can I make it? Verse 16 continues, ***"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."*** Therefore, desires of your flesh and desires of your eyes are not of the Father, but are of this world, and the world passes away. The desires will become corrupt. I have said it

repeatedly, that you will never see a funeral hearse towing a moving van. You cannot take it (your possessions) with you. However, you can store it (your treasures) up in heaven's bank account. As I said before, what a glorious day it will be when someone walks up to you in heaven and says, "I think you are part of the reason I am here. Because if you did not give that gift to that particular ministry where I heard the word, I might not be here today." Your participation is a sweet smell offering unto the Lord. It is precious, because your participation allows someone else to hear what He has done for you. That is why the Lord is well pleased with this, because He knows your heart.

Let us go on to 1 John 2:17, "***And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God, abideth forever.***" A proper translation of that word *lust* is a diseased condition of the soul. However, he that does the will of God remains forever. I have told you what the will of God is. It is denying yourself, taking up your cross, and following Jesus. The correct way to give is obediently applying the will of God in your life. It is an act of worship to God. It is something that God looks for, and He wants to be well pleased with the way you are doing it.

We are all supposed to be good stewards of His possessions, because they are all God's possessions. Start accumulating your treasures in heaven and not collecting them up here on earth. Plan for your future, be a good steward, but do not make the mistake of thinking that the more you can accumulate down here, the better off you will be. No, you will not. You are just creating for yourself a condition where you are going to fall into darkness. How great that darkness will be will depend on you. As I have said the tighter and less generous you are with your possessions, the greater the darkness you will have in your life. So be illuminated with generous giving so your whole body can be full of light. Live in the light, and be illuminated in the light by generous giving. Serve God and not money. Store your treasures up in heaven.

You can store your treasures in heaven through your participation here on earth. Give to ministries that are proclaiming the word of God correctly. You need to make the choice whether you want to live in the light or live in darkness. It is time to step up! Some of you already have. However, more of you need to take the responsibility on your shoulders by realizing that you have a wonderful opportunity and a privilege to get a message out that changes people's lives and brings them into the kingdom of God. Feeding the sheep is a requirement that everyone has to live up to and you have to do it in your capacity.

It is time to make a decision; either you are going to live in the light or live in darkness. I am not teaching the doctrine of "give to Jesus and get rich." I am teaching you to do it out of obedience and because you want to have a generous heart and live in the light. There are only two ways to act upon this message; either you will do it or you will not. Just the same, there are only two reasons for being; to glorify and serve God ***and*** to feed the sheep. Do not believe the lie that not

everyone participates in feeding the sheep, everyone does. Either you are delivering the message or you are actively supporting the one who is delivering it. Those are the only options. Let us all keep storing our treasures in heaven, while we are feeding the sheep on earth. Keep on Faithing!

To be continued. . .

You Can't Take It With You

Open your Bibles to Matthew chapter 6:19-24. Now before I even look into these verses, I want you to know: **You can't take it with you, but ... you can send it on ahead.**

You can't take it with you. I have said this many times before. When you are at a funeral, you do not see a hearse towing a U-Haul, or moving truck, with someone's belongings; things to bury with them at the gravesite. Now old Egyptian pharaohs did that, but after thousands of years when the treasure hunters and archeologists opened the tombs, all those treasures were still there. Time has proven that all of their belongings just collected dust. However, **you can't take it with you, but you can send it on ahead.**

I believe after studying the scriptures for over 30 years, almost 36 years now, reading everything I possibly could read, listening to preachers and pastors teaching on this particular subject, there is no greater source of understanding what true giving is than what is outlined by Jesus in Matthew 6:19-24. Once you understand these particular verses, then you will recognize Galatians 5:22 as one of the attributes of the Fruit of the Spirit, *Agathasune*, which concerns generous giving. These verses in Matthew are the greatest section of scripture concerning giving; New Testament giving.

There are a lot of prosperity doctrine teachers teaching that you can become rich like them. Those false doctrines twist scriptures, causing people to be misled. I guess these teachers found the secret the apostles could not locate. You may wonder if I have anything against anybody becoming rich. No, I believe if you are rich, you have become rich for a reason. God wants to use you as a funnel to fulfill the mission that He has called you to participate in, which includes The Great Commission. But if you do not become rich, do not consider yourself a second-class citizen. Everybody has the ability, but some have the ability to create wealth more than others. The world wants to teach you how the few can become the many, especially in the Christian world these days, and that is why so many people are attracted to the prosperity doctrines. But this doctrine does not work, and you cannot prove people have become rich by following any of the prosperity doctrines that are preached. Show me the results, even though there may be a few stories here and there, that is just what I said, a few.

If you understand Matthew 6 starting with verse 19, and start applying it in your life, you will be giving like a rich man, because you have learned to be an instrument or a funnel that God can use, especially in these last days when time is running short to fulfill The Great Commission.

I have asked myself over and over and I have tried to find everything in print and other media sources about these scriptures over the years, but the lack of material really puzzles me. There is no greater, instruction inside of God's Word concerning giving, from Genesis through Revelation about material things and possessions that you own, than these scriptures and the attitude you are supposed to have towards them. You just cannot find it.

Everybody is trying to find formulas or thinks, “Just tell me a percentage.” If you think you can give less than the Old Testament saints, I do not know who you are trying to fool. Old Testament giving was the beginning, because the Lord Christ changed the perspective of giving. Christ wants you to have a changed heart and a changed mind concerning giving and give not because you have to as a requirement. Some say, “Well the law said I have to give this much percentage as a tithe.” But even before the law we can find an account in the Old Testament where Abraham gave 10%, a tithe, to Melchizedek, which, just in case you forgot, was 10% of the spoils of war, which Abraham did not even consider his. And it was **not** his. He did not want any part of it. He took someone else’s spoils of war and gave 10% of it, or tithes, in this case, to Melchizedek.

So don’t give me your formulas. Formulas are for babies. If you want to be on baby formula that is fine, but at least come to the recognition of what it is. It is baby formula. Some Christians today believe there is no reference in the New Testament on how to give. That is why there are so many “hippies for Jesus” saying, “We don’t have to tithe in the New Testament.” That is right, and that is what I have said from day one. I have sat at the feet of some really good teachers and I have read and heard everything you can find on giving. And I will argue with any one of them today that you cannot find a set system of tithing in the New Testament. Just because Jesus referred to what a Pharisee should do (Matthew 23:23), does not mean that is the set system. You can’t prove it, I’m sorry. You can try to manipulate scripture to prove it, but you cannot prove it, because it is more than tithes and it is more than offerings in the New Testament. By the time I am done on this subject you will be wishing I would just preach on the old system of giving. At least that is an easier goal to accomplish, because even if you start at 5%, you can move your way up to that magic number of 10%.

First, if you understand anything about tithing in the Old Testament, it was never 10%. In fact, when you get to Moses’ day, and beyond, all different types of tithes and offerings were in place. If you do not agree with me, then prove me wrong, but do it with God’s Word. Too many Christians today feel that Old Testament giving was just too much of a demand on someone’s possessions. That is why all the “hippies for Jesus” want to focus on the New Testament way of giving. These “hippies” are manipulating God’s Word to form their theories on giving, and that is why I search and depend on God’s Word for interpretation. I do not drift from it; I do not try and philosophize my way out of God’s Word to develop an opinion about what I think God’s Word says. I want to know what it says, and what says is quite clear.

Let us just start reading some of the verses in scripture. Then I am going to share with you something from another author and I will have something to say about that text.

To begin, what does Matthew 6:19 through 21 mean when it says, ***“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”*** I will come back to that word **treasures** in a different message. Let us just stay with those three verses right now.

Let me share something with you from another author. Not very often I can share with you

anything, because you can hardly go through two paragraphs without somebody drifting off into speculation of what God's Word says. When I can, though, I like to do it. Make sure you pay close attention. I will go slowly, because you need to gather the concept of what Jesus was relaying here in these verses, Matthew 6:19 through 21.

This particular author says:

“In the greatest message ever preached, Jesus addresses the believer’s proper relationship to money and possessions. . . Jesus always had two kingdoms in mind.”

The author gets that reasoning from Matthew 6: 24, ***“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”***

“Jesus always had two kingdoms in mind. He spoke here of two treasuries, two perspectives, and two masters of those two kingdoms. Each . . . presents two options and demands one choice. There’s a default choice if ‘no choice’ is made. Unless the right choice is deliberately made and tenaciously clung to, the wrong choice will naturally be implemented. In that case, as if on automatic pilot, people will spend their lives investing in the wrong treasury, adopting the wrong perspective, and serving the wrong master. What is our treasure? A.W. Tozer suggested we may discover the answer by responding to four basic questions:

‘What do we value most? What would we hate to lose? What our thoughts turn to most frequently when we are free to think of what we will? And finally, what affords us greatest pleasure?’”

I could add a few more to those but let us just stay with this particular author’s presentation at the moment.

“. . . Based on these four questions, what’s your treasure?”

Hopefully, you are asking yourself that question. There are some who listen to my teaching that find it so hard to give because they have so very little. Whether you have so very little or so very much, that same pressure and that same resistance is going to be there. Do not think because you have more you are going to give more. I could line up a whole host of people down the street that have said, “If I just had more, I would give more.” Well why don’t you just start where you are at now and develop a right attitude of giving based on the four questions above?

“What’s your treasure?”

Most people would list people and relationships as their treasure. But if we’re honest, we’d also include money and possessions. . . Jesus suggests there’s an eternal use for money and possessions.”

I do not think He suggests it. I think He clearly tells us in scripture through the Gospel Record.

“When spent on earthly treasure, money is only of temporary value- unless it’s spent with a view towards heavenly treasure. Moths destroy fabric, rust destroys ‘precious’ metals, and

thieves can steal almost anything. Jesus could have gone on [to say] fire consumes, floods destroy, governments seize, enemies attack, investments go sour. No earthly treasure is safe.

As an example, I have known people that have made investments and they ended up losing their investment money. These people thought they would make a profit and are determined to keep the investment, even if it is losing money. People buy cars, stocks, coins, or jewelry and expect they will keep their value. Try buying a new car, drive it a few hundred miles, and then try to resell the car you think is still brand new. You may think only a few hundred dollars went off the selling price because it is still new. Try to resell it at the original value. You can't. We always over value what we think is precious, what has become our treasure, because we cannot conceive that we can make a dumb investment. If I had a nickel for every dumb investment that I have made, I would be richer than Bill Gates. Yes, it does take some education in investments and know-how, but even that is no sure guarantee you are going to become rich. See, there is a prosperity doctrine in the New Testament, but it is not the one being preached.

"...When spent on earthly treasure, money is only of temporary value- unless it's spent with a view toward heavenly treasure. Moths destroy fabric, rust destroys 'precious' metals, and thieves can steal almost anything... No earthly treasure is safe. But when money and possessions are spent on heavenly treasure, the equation changes radically. The investment takes on eternal value."

If you do not have any eternal values, you will never understand or comprehend what I am trying to communicate to you, because you are living for the here and now. And there is nothing wrong in living for the here and now to a certain degree, because you do have responsibilities. The Lord did say replenish the earth, and that carries with it certain responsibilities, but those are activities for the here and now. There is no moral reason or reason in scripture saying it is wrong to invest in certain things in the here and now. However, that is not what should be your first priority. It all depends, from an eternal perspective, where your priorities are; what comes first when you have some money to invest. Your first investment should always be in eternity; what is it that has precious value there.

Laying up your treasure where? Storing it where? In heaven; a heavenly, eternal bank account, where the return of your investment is indescribable. Making this type of investment should be the first and most important investment that you participate in. Then all other investments fall in line according to your priorities and needs. Do not tell me this abused and overused statement or phrase, "Well, if I just become rich, it would give me the opportunity to give more to Jesus." Or, "If I win the lottery, I'd have an opportunity to give more to Jesus." First, the Lord does not need to win any lottery to get done what He wants done through you. He just needs faithful people, people that have an eternal viewpoint, not an earthly one.

"But when money and possessions are spent on heavenly treasure, the equation changes radically. The investment takes on eternal value. (Since God, his Word, and people are eternal...)"

Think about that; your car, house, and stock certificates are **not** eternal.

“Since God, (number one) His Word, (number two) and people are eternal (number three), what will last is what is used wisely for God, his Word and his people.”

Kind of a giving trinity there isn't it?

“Jesus invites us to choose our treasury. Will we invest our treasures on earth and lose them when we die? Or will we invest our treasures in heaven, where they will be ours for eternity?”

But, if you do not believe in eternal things, this means absolutely nothing to you.

“In reading Matthew 6, many people see something negative and miss the positive. They think that Jesus is categorically against the storing up of treasures. In fact, Jesus didn't tell us not to store up treasures.”

That is right; I will point that out again.

“In fact, Jesus didn't tell us not to store up treasures. On the contrary, He commanded us to. He simply said, ‘Stop storing them up in the wrong place, and start storing them up in the right place.’ Christ's primary argument against amassing material wealth isn't that it's morally wrong, but simply that it's a poor investment. Material things just won't stand the test of time. Even if they escape moths and rust and thieves, they cannot escape the coming fire of God that will consume the material world (2Peter 3:7). Jesus isn't saying it's wrong to invest. He is saying, ‘Don't make a stupid investment, make a smart one.’”

This is worth repeating.

***“Don't make a stupid investment, make a smart one.’
John Wesley said, ‘I value all things only by the price it shall gain in eternity.’ David Livingstone said, ‘I place no value on anything I possess, except in relation to the kingdom of God.’ God's kingdom was the reference point for these men. They saw all else in light of that kingdom. They were compelled to live as they did, not because they treasured no things, but because they treasured the right things. When we think of missionaries, we often visualize simple people with no aspirations for treasures or greatness. We miss something in missionary martyr Jim Elliot's famous words. . .”***

Read closely.

“. . . ‘He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.’”

Let me repeat what Jim Elliot said.

“‘He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.’ We focus on his willingness to sacrifice and serve, but we neglect his passion for personal gain. Re-read his words and you'll see that Jim Elliot was a profit seeker! What separated him from the common Christian wasn't that he didn't want treasure, but that he wanted true and lasting treasure. He wasn't satisfied with treasure that would be lost, only treasure that would last.”

Treasure that would last!

“Christ’s position on wealth is not that it should be rejected...”

Let me repeat that.

“Christ’s position on wealth is not that it should be rejected, but that it should be pursued”.

Some may think, “A-ha, here comes the prosperity doctrines. Now I am listening. I cannot wait to see what I am going to get in the here and now.” It is always the here and now they focus in on.

“Christ’s position on wealth is not that it should be rejected, but that it should be pursued. It’s an understatement to say that God doesn’t object to investment mentality. According to this passage, God has an investment mentality. Christ agrees wholeheartedly with us: wealth is worth seeking. The question is what constitutes true wealth? Jesus vividly described what it’s like when we discover true wealth, ‘The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field’ (Matthew 13:44).”

In Matthew 13, starting at the beginning of the chapter, you find the parable of the sower. Then comes the wheat and tares, then the mustard seed, leaven, and then in verse 34, the parables are explained. Amid all those parables, there are some giving parables. The ‘*buried treasure*’ in verse 44 is what this author is referring to. In the King James, verse 44 says, “*Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy. . .*” Circle that word joy. “. . . *thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath...*” He sells everything to do what? To go buy that field where he knows hidden treasure is located. This is a giving message. He sold everything with joy to invest in buying that field where he knew the true treasure was located.

“This man, like most of us, was probably quite attached to his possessions. Yet, having seen the value of this great treasure in the field, he ‘sold all he had’. . .”

For what?

“. . .to obtain it. Did the sacrifice pain him?”

Scripture says it was with joy.

“Should we feel sorry for him that the treasure cost him everything? No! ‘In his joy,’ he sold all to obtain the treasure. Why? It was a simple question of relative value. Until he found the treasure, all his possessions seemed valuable. But compared to the dazzling beauty and incalculable worth of what he had discovered, everything he had owned and treasured to that point seemed worthless. John White said this about the man in the parable who gives up everything for this one great treasure: ‘The choice he faces lies between his worthless bits and

pieces and the field with buried treasure. There is nothing noble about his sacrifice. There would, on the other hand, be something incredibly stupid about not making it. Anyone but a fool would do exactly as the man did. Everyone will envy him his good fortune and commend him not on his spiritual character but on his common sense.’”

If you have your mind on eternal things, you can say that. If you do not, you would be mocked and considered a fool based on earthly values.

“The greatest treasure is Christ himself. To Paul, gaining Christ made everything else seem comparatively worthless (Philippians 3:7-11). But part of gaining Christ was looking forward to eternal reward, Christ’s stamp of approval on his faithful service while on earth. This prospect of eternal reward from his Master’s hand was Paul’s consuming motivation throughout his life (I Corinthians 9:24-27) and his greatest anticipation at his death (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Christ offers us the incredible opportunity to trade temporary goods and currency for eternal rewards. By putting our money and possessions in his treasury while we’re still on earth, we assure ourselves of eternal rewards beyond comprehension. Consider the implications of this offer. We can trade temporal possessions we can’t keep to gain eternal possessions we can’t lose.”

Read that again slower.

“We can trade temporal possessions we can’t keep to gain eternal possessions we can’t lose. This is like a child trading bubble gum for a new bicycle, or a man offered ownership of a Coca-Cola company in exchange for a sack of bottle caps. Only a fool would pass up the opportunity. What we keep we will lose. What we give and share and do in Christ’s name will ultimately come back to us in heaven, in a far better and permanent form. Anything we try to hang on to here will be lost but anything we put into God’s hands will be ours for eternity (and insured for infinitely more than a \$100,000 by the real FDIC: The Father’s Deposit Insurance Corporation).

If we give instead of keep, if we invest in the eternal instead of the temporal, we store up in heaven treasures that will never stop paying dividends. Whatever treasures we store up on earth will be left behind when we leave. Whatever treasures we store in heaven will be waiting for us when we arrive . . . Note that the central focus of Matthew 6:19 through 24 is the accumulation of heavenly treasures, not [earthly treasures]. We’re to avoid [storing up] treasures on earth not as an end in itself, but as part of a life strategy to lay up treasures in heaven.”

It is just a smart investment.

“A person may give up all earthly treasures without ever investing in heavenly treasures. Jesus is not looking for aesthetics...”

This means giving up everything to live a simple life.

“Jesus is not speculating he’s speaking of sure things. When he warns us not to store up treasures on earth, it’s not just because wealth might be lost. It’s that wealth will definitely be lost. Either it leaves us while we live, or we leave it while we die.”

Back to the same thing I keep saying. You do not ever see a hearse towing a U-Haul with what we call all our precious ‘stuff’ to be buried with us, to take it with us. ***‘Naked a man comes from his mother’s womb, and as he comes, so does he depart. He takes nothing from his labor that he can carry in his hands (Ecclesiastes 5:15).’*** Here, the author is referring to another giving chapter in the Old Testament.

“Do not be afraid when a man becomes rich, when the glory of his house is increased; for when he dies he will carry nothing away; his glory will not descend after him (Psalm 49:16-20 NASB).

You can’t take it with you. King Tut thought that by surrounding himself with treasures, they would be his in the afterlife. He was wrong. They didn’t go with him. When Howard Carter discovered Tut’s tomb in 1922, the treasures were still there. Today those treasures sit in the Cairo Museum. They’re still there, but Tut is long gone. You can’t take it with you.

When Jesus speaks of moths and rust and thieves taking our earthly treasures, he is saying in effect: ‘You can’t take it with you.’ But then he added something breathtaking, something revolutionary, a brand-new [addition] to the old [idea]: ‘You can’t take it with you, but . . . you can send it on ahead.’ What a stunning qualification. Who would have dared to think such a thing possible- that we creatures of dust could make choices today that would result in possessing eternal treasures in heaven? Moses prayed, ‘Make permanent the works of my hands’ (Psalm 90:17, literal translation). Jesus says, “Here’s how you can do that: Take treasures you could have stored up on earth (only to eventually lose them) and instead store them up in heaven, where they’ll remain intact for eternity.’ People are always looking for safe places to put their money. Jesus says there’s ultimately only one safe place to put our money: the kingdom of God. By wisely and generously...”

Generously once again is an attribute of the Fruit of the Spirit, ***agathasune***, Galatians 5:22, where I have preached about it in messages about the Fruit of the Spirit.

“By wisely and generously using our earthly resources, which will mean foregoing some earthly treasures, we can lay up treasures in heaven.

Returning to the question that was posed earlier, what is your treasure? Is it your house? Car? Boat? Library? Gun collection?”

Only you can answer that for yourself.

“Is your treasure in art, coins or gold? Is it in savings, a retirement program, insurance policies, annuities, real estate or commodities? Is your treasure five hundred shares of AT&T or Microsoft? Some people may own these items without them necessarily being their treasures. But every possession we hold onto presents a constant temptation that it will become our treasure.

Paul told the rich in this world that through their generosity . . . they may 'layup treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age' (1 Timothy 6:18-19)."

I have preached on this before. 1 Timothy 6:17 states, ***"Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded [proud], nor trust in uncertain riches..."*** Literally *trust* means to not expect or hope for anything from those uncertain riches. ***"...but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy."*** I could track this verse and cross reference it front and back in this book called God's Word. He allows you to have enjoyment with some of your things, but He gave you those things, so you can participate in His master plan. And what is that master plan? Verse 18 says, ***"That they do good, that they be rich in good works..."*** Underline the word 'works. That is *ergon* in the Greek. *Ergon* always involves the employment of something when it is involved in spiritual things and scripture. ***"That they do good, that they be rich in [the good employment], ready to distribute, willing to communicate..."*** Circle that word 'communicate'. One of the translations is 'to make others share in your possessions', but 'free in giving liberally' is the best translation.

Then Paul carries the concept that Jesus presented for our understanding and knowledge in verse 19, ***"Laying up in store for themselves..."***, or us, when we have the eternal viewpoint and perspective, ***"... a good foundation against the time to come..."*** And that is an awful long time if you could calculate eternity, which I don't think anyone can ***"...that they may lay hold on eternal life."*** Paul understood it, not just in these verses, in other verses, too. And the other apostles understood it as well.

So what makes us the exception to the rule of laying up our treasures in heaven? Prosperity doctrine teachers? The answer is no. No matter if it is prosperity light or prosperity heavy. There is no exception to the rule.

"Christians throughout the ages have taken these passages literally and have been far less serious than we are about earthly treasures and far more serious about heavenly treasures. John Bunyan wrote Pilgrim's Progress from an English prison cell to which he had been condemned for unlicensed preaching of the gospel. This is how he interpreted the words of Christ and Paul:

'Whatever good thing you do for him if done according to the Word is laid for you as a treasure in chests and coffers to be brought out to be rewarded before both men and angels to your eternal comfort.'

Is this a Biblical concept? Absolutely! Paul spoke about the Philippians' financial giving and explained, 'Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account' (Philippians 4:17)."

They wanted to participate in Paul's ministry, because they knew what Paul was doing; getting the Word out about Christ and His salvation, power, and grace. They (the Philippians) did not want to be left out.

"God keeps an account open for us in heaven, and every gift given for his glory is a deposit in

that account. Not only God, not only others, but we are the eternal beneficiaries of our giving. Have you been making regular deposits?”

This author asked that question, and I am asking you that same question. There are some of you that find it so hard for you to even release five dollars. Giving is an attribute of the Fruit of the Spirit. That means the Spirit of God has to be in you and if He is in you, why are you resisting? Only you can answer that question. I cannot answer it for you. I can speculate why, but you have to be honest with yourself. Have you been making regular deposits, because this will affect us, it affects all of us. Why?

“Does it seem strange that Jesus commands us to do what’s in our own best interest?”

Jesus is telling us to participate in giving, because He could foresee our future. He wants you to have all the riches of glory that He will give out by rewarding you for your participation. He knows what is in your best interest, but you are only concerned with your best interest in the here and now.

“Isn’t that selfish? No- God expects and commands us to act out of enlightened self-interest.”

Wow, you never hear that anywhere!

“Our generosity is not only for God’s glory, not only for other’s good...”

Why? Because they are hearing the Word that rescues them.

“...but also for our good.”

That is our self-interest.

“Selfishness is when we pursue gain at the expense of others. But God doesn’t have a limited number of the treasures to distribute. When you store up treasures for yourself in heaven, it doesn’t reduce the treasures available to others. In fact, it is by serving God and others that we store up heavenly treasures. Everyone gains, no one loses.”

God is pleased with it, because it benefits others and it also benefits us. That is the trinity of giving.

“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Remember, ‘heart’ is *kardia*. It means ‘the center and seat of spiritual life.’ It is an out flowing of God’s Spirit in you to have the Philippian attitude.

I can hear those Philippian Christians asking, “Where is Paul going now? Where is he? Make sure we get his forwarding address. We want to continue participating. We do not want to be left out. We got the message. We want to participate because we realize it’s being stored in our bank account that Jesus is keeping a record of and He’s looking closely.” And Jesus is probably there saying, “Come on! You’re almost at this reward level.” I’m making it sound silly to make a

point. You cannot give to get to heaven, but you can give to get rewards. It is part of God's plan. He wants you to have it.

Now we are back where we started at the beginning of this chapter. There are two treasuries. What is your priority focused on? The priority of the bank of heaven or the bank of yourself? This priority, and the thing that should get your attention first and every payday, every bonus day, or whatever system of payment you receive for your services, should be the bank of heaven. God will take care of all the rest.

Tithing is just a starting point. Giving offerings is just a starting point. Some believe because they were taught that God has governors to regulate giving. Show me that in the New Testament record. **SHOW ME.** That is why Paul says there are **hilarious givers**. King James says **cheerful**. Some Greek translators described these types of Christians as being out of their mind because they could not be stopped from giving. Why is that? Because the Spirit of God is flowing through them to give hilariously. They realize how it is not only pleasing to God, it is benefiting others, and in this case, it is in their own, and our, self-interest. It is benefiting us because we will be the recipients of those rewards. I have told you over and over, if it is not this ministry that you give to, then find a ministry, find a church and start giving hilariously, start being an *agathasune* giver.

Start laying your treasures up in heaven and don't hold anything back, which includes your money, your possessions, and your time. God does keep an account open for us up in heaven and every tithe, offering, and gift that is deposited there, He is keeping a record of. Someone might use the excuse that they have given a lot in the past and not understand why they have to give any more. Really? Is that what you believe? Who is keeping the record of the bank account in heaven you or the Lord? Obviously, it is you if you have that attitude. You have not been captured by the spirit of giving.

I'm not done with this subject. I want to spend some time on the most important passage of giving in scripture that has been neglected for far too long. Right now, we are just looking at the treasures.

As I began this chapter, **you can't take it with you, but you can send it on ahead.**

There are two choices, keep it and lose it, or send it on ahead because you joyfully understand the benefits of giving. Not just for you and not just for others, but how the Lord is pleased in the true act of worth-ship of giving.

To be continued...

Inexhaustible Rewards

Open your Bibles to Luke chapter 12. We are going to look at verses 33 and 34. I am continuing on what I started in the last chapter concerning laying up treasures in heaven and how important and necessary it is in our Christian walk. Now in the last chapter we were in Matthew 6 and here in The Gospel of Luke we can see a similar story. Here, Luke adds additional details to the story, but let me share with you what one author writes first.

“Is Jesus speaking metaphorically when He refers to ‘treasures’? Or is storing up treasures in heaven instead of on earth a reference to financial giving? I believe it is. Although Christ’s words can be applied in principle to investing in God’s kingdom the treasures of our time and talents, the primary meaning relates to giving our money and possessions. The first indicator that Jesus is talking about our money is the context of his remarks.

He begins this segment of his message by addressing the spiritual disciplines of giving, praying, and fasting. Because he has been talking about giving, his audience would naturally understand that the recommendation to ‘store up treasures for yourself in heaven’ is an elaboration on the subject of giving.

Second, the word treasure has an obvious literal meaning. His listeners knew that ‘treasures on earth’ were money, gems, gold, land, houses, livestock, and other valued possessions. When Jesus told them not to store up their treasures on earth but in heaven, they would naturally conclude he was saying to invest them in purposes close to God’s heart.”

That is just what the assumption was. They were not an uneducated audience when it came to giving. Remember, they were aware of all offerings in relation to the Mosaic Law. They knew the stories. Giving was part of their makeup; part of their daily activity. They were familiar with it. Let us read that again:

“His listeners knew that ‘treasures on earth’ were money, gems, gold, land, houses, livestock, and other valued possessions. When Jesus told them not to store up their treasures on earth but in heaven, they would naturally conclude he was saying to invest them in purposes close to God’s heart. Third, his audience was very familiar with giving, which was an important part of the instruction of the Old Testament that they were taught in homes and synagogues. He adds a new dimension to the subject, but they would not be surprised for him to address it. Fourth, the clincher is Luke 12:33, when Jesus unmistakably connects giving with providing ‘treasures in heaven.’”

This author uses an incorrect translation of Luke 12:33 from the New International Version. When you analyze the original language that Jesus spoke, and also analyze the Greek language, it does not match the NIV translation at the beginning of the verse. The NIV says in this verse, *“Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near or no moth destroys.”*

But, what does Luke 12:33 in the King James Version read? ***“Sell that ye have, and give alms...”*** Circle that word ‘alms.’

Before going on, understand that this is why I do not recommend too many sources, especially when many who are a part of this ministry are not seasoned, mature Christians. Some of the modern translations used today, which are incorrectly translated which many preachers and pastors use, have their foundation in Westcott and Hort; the founders of modern Bible translations. These two individuals in the late 1800’s, in my opinion, did not clarify God’s Word in their Bible translations. They were responsible for replacing the **Universal Text** of the Authorized Version with the **Local Text** of Egypt and the Roman Catholic Church. Also, they created a translation from a manuscript that was found in a trash can.

Now, in the past I have preached several messages on ‘*Eleemosune*.’ To review this word, go to Matthew 6:1, where I have previously preached on the first four verses. Matthew 6:1 says, ***“Take heed that ye do not your alms...”*** ‘*Eleemosune*’ is the Greek word used here for alms in this verse. Some of you may have ‘righteousness’ written there in place of ‘alms.’ I am sorry; I know some of you have been taught that giving makes you righteous but giving does not make you righteous. The early translations do not even include the word ‘righteousness.’ Righteousness only comes when you trust and have faith in Jesus Christ and it is His righteousness, not yours.

The verse should read, ***“Take heed that ye do not your ‘Eleemosune’. . .”*** the word that originally was placed there in the Greek, ***“. . . before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms [Eleemosune], do not sound a trumpet. . .”*** literally ‘cause not a trumpet to be sounded’ ***“. . . before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms [Eleemosune], let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly”*** (Matthew 6:1-4).

Yes, you can be rewarded for even charitable giving. In just about every case, except in Luke 12:33, ‘*Eleemosune*’ is concerned with charitable giving, and in past messages, I had you circle the words; ***“That thy Eleemosune may be in secret.”***

There were two chambers in the synagogue or sanctuary location where you could deposit the secret giving. One was called “the chamber of secrets” and the other “the chamber of vessels.” Now in “the chamber of secrets” people would walk up to that particular container and put their alms in this container. Almost like a drop box. And if you traced the history of what this “chamber of secrets” was dedicated for, it was usually for the poor children. Although there were times it was distributed to widows that were in need, and it was all done privately.

You could not call up a telethon hotline expecting to receive a certain amount of recognition because you gave \$500, then wait and hope that the host of that telethon would eventually read your pledge. This is what Jesus was referring to about doing ***“your Eleemosune in secret,”*** not to be a hypocrite or to be seen by others, and that is how the word is used most of the time, with the

exception of Luke 12:33. This author is using an incorrect translation, which states in the NIV, **“Sell your possessions and give to the poor.”** The author is thinking that this is *Eleemosune* that Christ is speaking of, because nine out of ten times the giving was used as charity or charitable gifts. To understand this, however, you need more of a foundation than a simple translation. So, what is *Eleemosune*?

In the Greek, ‘alms’ is **Eleemosune or eleos**, and is defined as:

- 1) Giving to the poor
- 2) Mercy - to show compassion, desiring to help
- 3) Misery, which is the consequence of sins: Physical source or Spiritual Source

Now follow me: Alms is **Eleemosune**. Where does **Eleemosune** come from? It comes from **eleos**. What does **eleos** mean? Most of the time, **eleos** usually refers to a certain type of misery; misery which comes as the consequence of sins. That misery has two sources; a physical source as in people suffering in the physical state, and also misery because of spiritual decay. To restate this, **eleos** refers to a certain type of misery, which is the consequence of sins, created by a physical source or spiritual decay. In the Greek alms is **Eleemosune**, and **Eleemosune** comes from **eleos**.

Eleemosune also carries two important definitions. The first definition here used in context of Matthew 6:1-4 is referring to giving to the poor. Why? Because if you go back to the root of the word, most of the poor have some type of misery, mostly in the physical sense; they have a physical need.

But the second definition we could apply to **Eleemosune** is a definition that carries a spiritual context of individuals needing mercy. When mercy and **Eleemosune** are combined in these verses in Luke 12:33; it means to show compassion, a desiring to help. In this case it could be used in the desire to help to bring the rescue message; the message of the Gospel of the Good News of Jesus Christ to the people who are in misery, because it may be a physical source, but most of the time it is a spiritual decay. And, it could also be both at the same time.

To repeat, **Eleemosune** carries two definitions. It is referring to giving to the poor as illustrated in Matthew 6:1-4, but it also carries a definition of mercy, showing compassion with a desire to help ones that are in a spiritually decayed state.

So, look at Luke 12:33. **“Sell that ye have, and give alms [Eleemosune].”** This is the sister story to Matthew 6. It does not say, **“Sell your possessions and give to the poor. . . provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”**

Am I saying that **Eleemosune** only has a meaning of spiritual decay so that we provide things to people, which are in misery because of the consequence of sins in the spiritual sense? No. I am saying the misery could be either physical or spiritual. But, if you read the scriptures before and after the verse, you can see the spiritual application that needs to be applied. I always say to keep things in context, just do not pick at scriptures. I preached a Spiritual Warfare message on

that subject. There are individuals who just want to pick out scriptures and use it for their own purposes.

However, in this case, the context cannot be easily determined. Beginning with verse 35 in the same chapter, Christ is speaking concerning the watchful servants. The watchful servants' message has a spiritual application, which is watching for their master's return and also taking care of the house and other responsibilities assigned to them. So the context could be either spiritual or physical.

I think this is the one time the full meaning of **Eleemosune** is applied because of what comes after verse 34. There is no way, if you look at the languages that these scriptures were written in, you could come to the conclusion that only the poor is intended. So let us move on.

“Sell that ye have, and give Eleemosune; provide yourselves bags which wax not old. . .” Circle ‘wax not old.’ “. . . a treasure in the heavens that faileth not...” ‘Wax old’ is **Palaioo** in the Greek, and **Palaioo** is defined as ‘things that become worn out by use and time.’ As I have said, Luke 12:33 should read, *“Sell that ye have, and give Eleemosune”*, which has two different meanings and both should be applied here in this verse. Nothing is left out, and why would you leave anything out? Why would you give anything [**Eleemosune**] in the first place unless it is because you see the human need from the physical demands and because, more importantly, you have eternity as your viewpoint? You are giving because you know you are part of a rescue mission that this world needs so badly. You are giving to the poor to help the ones that are in spiritual decay and I believe both definitions of **Eleemosune** are intended to be understood in this verse. You can see that prior to verse 33 in the story about the need of man, and you see the spiritual aspect also after verse 34. So you have the physical need and the spiritual decay, which you are giving to further God's purposes, how He wants to use you in the Great Commission.

We are not only to help the human need of mankind, but more importantly, their spiritual needs are to be improved by hearing God's Word. Romans 10:17 says, *“Faith cometh by hearing and hearing the Word of God.”* It does not say faith comes by anything else. **Faith comes by hearing.** That is why this ministry and others are important. That is why it is important to keep this ministry alive. That is why it is important to get the message of Christ out to the world. That is why you participate in the capacity that God has called you to. This involves your money, your possessions, your time, and your talent.

The verse in Luke continues, *“...that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”*

If you study for yourself this verse in Luke, you will see all the translations focus on the poor. But, I believe **Eleemosune** in every aspect of giving is applied here for the spiritual and the physical need of mankind. We are to participate as willing and obedient servants of Christ Jesus. Now that I have explained, let us move forward with what the author says,

“The use of thief and moth and treasure, and the injunction to provide money belts ‘for yourselves’...”

Of course when it says ‘*money belts*’ it says in the original “*provide yourselves bags*” and a money belt is actually not a bad translation. You can use bags, purses, money belts, which was very common in that day.

“The use of thief and moth and treasure, and the injunction to provide money belts ‘for yourselves’ shows that this passage in Luke is more than just a parallel passage to Matthew 6:19. It’s another way of saying the same thing, but it was spoken on another occasion- and because most of his teachings aren’t repeated, the repetition emphasizes its importance.”

Read that again.

“...and because most of His teachings aren’t repeated, the repetition emphasizes its importance.”

Think about it. The Lord wanted to make sure you got the message on what your responsibilities are in this Great Commission.

“This passage unmistakably connects selling one’s possessions with giving them away, thereby providing treasures in heaven. The purpose is not aestheticism- no longer having money- but ministry . . . The picture of the ‘money belt’ or ‘purse’ . . . that doesn’t wear out further develops the concept of heavenly treasures. Our giving is the conduit, container, or means that safely delivers the treasures to heaven. We provide assets for ourselves in heaven by giving away our assets on earth.”

Not a very popular message especially when you are coming against people that are preaching the prosperity doctrine, give to get rich. I am sorry, unless you twist scripture there is nowhere in God’s Word that says you are to give to get rich and there is nowhere in God’s Word where it says because you give, you will be rich in the here and now. Now the Lord can make you rich. Maybe He can trust you with the kind of riches that He will use for His purposes, because He knows what you will do with them which will please Him. I am not saying it is morally wrong to be rich or spiritually wrong to be rich. It depends on what the Lord wants to do with you and how He wants to use you.

I can almost feel the tension when I tell people this. They like it better when I teach on The Last Days or something else. They are not going to open the zipper to their purses, because they have too little or maybe too much to hang on to. You know who you are; you know what you have been avoiding. I guess you have decided to just skip over these scriptures or apply a different interpretation from what God’s Word says.

Because of that, you have two problems. Peter warned us in his letters that when you take scripture and make your own private interpretation what the outcome would be. So both problems are really an outward rebellion to His instruction and demand on our lives. Maybe you think the Lord would not care for you financially. But did not the Lord take care of the lilies? Does not He feed the birds? He knows what you need. He says in Luke 12:28 to30, *“If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and tomorrow is cast into the oven; how*

much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith? And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.”

He knows you need to be provided for. He knows what your needs are, but most of us have desires that go way beyond our needs. It is not wrong to have some of those desires if they are not the center and focus of your life. Those desires should not be all you think about or dream about. Those things may be added unto you also, but what were promised by Christ are clothes on your back and food in your belly and the necessities of life to keep you going. Why? To serve Him! And Luke goes on to say in verse 31-32, **“But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; [little flock with little faith] for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”** You may think, “Can I have the kingdom here and now?” No, because you are not supposed to lay treasures up in **this** kingdom; it is the eternal kingdom which our focus should be on; in our bank account in heaven.

I am going to be honest with you deep down inside. I know why I have preached very little on giving, even though what I have preached on giving still demands a commitment and obedience, which is an act of worth-ship to God. Paul even calls giving **“a sweet smell offering.”** In the Old Testament, if you understand the offerings, certain offerings were a sweet smell that was lifted to the heavens, which God was pleased in, because giving was done correctly and from the heart. Paul used that illustration in the Philippian letter, but I know why I have not preached more on giving, and like I said earlier, most ministries and churches, if not all, would never, could never survive by preaching only six or less messages in almost five years eight months. Think about it. That is one message a year, and that is assuming you only get one sermon a week.

God gave me the ability to survive outside this ministry. I and this ministry have not been dependent on you to survive. He has taken care of me. He has put food in my stomach. He has given me drink. He has me wearing clothes. I know why I have taught so seldom on giving, because I know the kind of tension and resistance teaching on giving develops. No one wants to be told, even if it comes from God’s Word, what they should be doing with their money and possessions. But, I am just preaching what God’s Word says. If you do not send your offering here or to your church or any other ministry, that is your business between you and God. You have to answer for that. My obligation is get the message to you.

The Lord will take care of us if we put Him first. I am living proof of it. He has taken care of me through all of life’s good and bad. I have been on the roller coaster of life. I have been abased and abound. When push comes to shove, and this is not boasting, the Lord knows He can trust me, because He knows where my heart is.

Do I like nice things? Absolutely! Do I have all that my heart desires? Absolutely not! But the older I get and the closer I get to Him, the less I care for those desires. My passion in life is Jesus Christ. My heart was finally captured while preaching through The Last Days Series. It finally dawned on me what little time we have to send the message of the Good News to the ones in spiritual decay. They need to be rescued, and how do you think that is going to happen?

Nothing in this world comes for free. For example, the electric company has not offered to pay

the bill this month. To keep this ministry going requires participation from you and me. Too many have been rebellious and resistant to step up and say, “God you can count on me. I want to start being a hilarious giver even if I don’t make very much.” The amount you give is not that important compared to **how** you give, and give for the right reasons. At the same time, do not think you are going to move God if you plan to give less than the Old Testament saints. Their giving was just the standard that was established. That is why I do not agree with these ‘hippies for Jesus’ saying there is no tithing in the New Testament. Actually, there is a lot more than tithing or offerings in the New Testament. They obviously do not know scripture and should keep their mouths shut. They are super spiritual fools and do not even know it.

To return to the author,

“The picture of the ‘money belt’ or ‘purse’ . . . that doesn’t wear out further develops the concept of heavenly treasures. Our giving is the conduit, container, or means that safely delivers the treasures to heaven. We provide assets for ourselves in heaven by giving away our assets on earth.

Jesus adds another insight in Luke 12 that is not present in Matthew 6. Not only is heavenly treasure not subject to thieves and moths, not only will the heavenly money belt not wear out, but there is ‘a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted.’

Remember, all this started with this particular segment of the reading when I read “that faileth not” in Luke 12:33.

“This refinement is significant because this says not simply that these heavenly treasures are safe and indestructible, as Matthew 6 suggests, but they are also inexhaustible.”

Treasures that is inexhaustible. What does that mean? It means they can be used in heaven without ever being used up. That is why I explained **palaioo** - things of this world that become worn out through time and use. Things in this world eventually will get used up and worn out, but when you store your treasures in heaven, not only are they being stored there, but also they will not be destroyed or stolen from you by thieves. Thieves, moths, anything that can destroy will have no access to that treasure. But there is a further promise. **“They are inexhaustible.”** That is, they can be used in heaven without ever being used up or become used up. So what I am saying is those treasures are there for eternity. They are inexhaustible. They cannot be used up. If I can only get you to think that, to trust that, to faith that.

Some of you invest in things of this world such as a house, and your greatest concern is its value. From the first day and thereafter that house begins its gradual decay, so you work hard for that not to happen so quickly. Well guess what? It will wear out, but the treasures that you store up in heaven are inexhaustible and they do not wear out and they cannot be used up. You get it?

I am going to share with you a simplistic example.

“A boy who gives a girl a little drink of water out of kindness on earth will receive for this a reward that can be enjoyed without being consumed. On earth, his mother might see his good deed and bake him a cake...”

And believe me, I do not mix works with giving. Those of you that follow this ministry and what I have taught here for a few years have come to realize that.

“On earth his mother may see his good deed and bake him a cake, which he would gratefully eat. But then it would be gone. But in heaven we can enjoy and use our rewards, our heavenly treasures- whatever they may be- without ever exhausting them. Not only will there be rewards in heaven for the cup of water given on earth, but those rewards will never disappear. The act of kindness will be remembered forever and its rewards will always last. Hence, eternal rewards are not only ‘rewards we receive in eternity,’ but rewards that are themselves eternal, imperishable, inexhaustible (I Peter 1:4).”

Imagine giving more than a cup of water. Giving the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and everything from Genesis to Revelation rightly divided that rescues lost individuals. Furthermore, we need to bring the message to them about how they can start storing their treasures in heaven, which are inexhaustible. Talk about getting a good stock tip or being on the inside of a good investment. Your role is a lot greater than what is being preached in most churches across this nation.

To say that something cannot ever be used up is more than to say cannot be stolen or spoiled. Something to be safe and untainted, such as a meal or an admission ticket, yet once used or consumed it’s gone. But our treasures in heaven are inexhaustible. Moses prayed the oldest psalm, ‘Establish thou the work of our hands upon us...’ (Psalms 90:17). The literal translation is ‘make permanent the work of our hands.’ This is our heart’s desire- that we do things here and now that would survive this world that would bear fruit forever in the world to come. That is exactly what Christ promises.

I use this analogy . . .

Imagine you’re alive at the end of the Civil War.”

The Civil War happened in America around 1860 to 1865. Abraham Lincoln was president. Brother fought against brother, mostly over slavery.

“Imagine you’re alive at the end of the Civil War. You’re living in the South, but you’re a Northerner. You plan to move home as soon as the war’s over. While in the South you’ve accumulated a lot of Confederate currency. Now, suppose you know for a fact that the North’s going to win the war and the end is imminent. What will you do with your Confederate money? [The money you have been storing up.]

If you’re smart, there’s only one answer. You should immediately cash in your Confederate currency for U.S. currency- the only money that will have value once the war’s over. Keep only enough Confederate currency to meet your short term needs.”

Let me repeat that.

“Keep only enough confederate currency to meet your short term needs. As believers, we have inside knowledge of a coming change in the worldwide economic situation. The currency of this world will be worthless at our death or Christ’s return, both of

which are imminent. This knowledge should radically affect our investment strategy. For us to accumulate vast earthly treasures in the face of the inevitable future is equivalent to stockpiling Confederate money. It's not just wrong, it's just stupid.

Kingdom currency, backed by the eternal treasury, is the only medium of exchange recognized by the Son of God, whose government will last forever. The currency of his kingdom is our present faithful service and sacrificial use of our resources for him. The payoff in eternity will be what Paul called "a firm foundation," consisting of treasures beyond our wildest dreams.

In the financial world, there are experts known as 'market timers.' When they read the signs that the stock market is about to take a downward turn, they recommend switching funds immediately into more dependable or consistent investments, such as treasury bills, money markets, or certificates of deposit. In Matthew 6, Jesus functions as the foremost investment advisor..."

I have to repeat that. And why should not we listen to Jesus if that is true? What would be your excuse for not listening?

"In Matthew 6, Jesus functions as the foremost investment advisor, the ultimate expert in the economics of earth and heaven. His strategy is simple. He tells us to switch investment vehicles once and for all. He says we should transfer our funds from earth- which is volatile and ready to take a permanent dive- to heaven, which is totally dependable and is coming soon to forever replace earth's economy."

Either you believe that or you don't.

"In Wall Street terms, Christ is bearish when it comes to investing on earth. His financial forecast for this world is ultimately bleak. But he's unreservedly bullish about investing in heaven, where every market indicator is eternally positive!"

He is eternally positive. *"Sell that ye have, and give eleemosune."* Give because you know, not only that it pleases the Lord, but it shows compassion with your desire to help. Help who? Help what? Well, in a charitable way, to help others such as the poor, but in a spiritual context because there is so much spiritual decay in the world. You should be giving for the spiritual enlightenment of others concerning God's Word. How they can be rescued and if they are already rescued, how they can grow in God's Word. Period! It is a desire to help, a type of mercy that shows compassion because the burning desire is in you and nothing can hold you back.

So now I am back to that Spirit of God and one of the attributes of the Fruit of the Spirit, *agathasune*, generous giving. Provide yourselves bags, money belts, purses, whatever you want to use as a translation that does not become worn out or used up.

Remember, there are inexhaustible treasures that faileth not, where no thief and no bugs get to it. You also have to tell yourself, *"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."* The only question tonight is, "Where is your heart?" Where is your primary investment? Is it in the

things of this world? Just because others focus on the things of this world does not make it the right thing to do. The only thing you should be concerned with is how your giving lines up with God's Word, not someone else's actions. To repeat, the question is, "Where is your heart?" That answer will determine where your treasure is.

To be continued. . . .

Two Perspectives

Part 1

Open your Bibles to Matthew 6:19. In Matthew, we have been looking at verses 19 to 21, and we also have been reading from the book of Luke. In this chapter we will be reading verses 22 and 23 from Matthew 6.

In this series I have been sharing from several different authors. Sometimes I have agreed with them and sometimes I have not and I have expressed why I did not agree with a certain author. When there are things that I can share with you from outside sources, I do not mind doing it as long as they stay in God's Word and rightly divide it, especially on the subject of giving. There are many of different opinions on giving that are drawn from the Old Testament. The question that I have raised in this series is what is the New Testament concept of giving? I am not saying to ignore the Old Testament concept. What I have been saying is that it goes above and beyond the Old Testament concept. Jesus takes giving to a whole other level if you really understand and want to understand Matthew 6:19.

This verse says, ***“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”***

Verse 21, ***“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”*** is the most misunderstood verse when it comes to giving. Furthermore, most people just do not want to understand it or live by it. Doing that takes giving too far. It demands too much from them. So, they ignore it.

How many preachers or pastors do you even hear preaching on this subject on any given Sunday? Just the opposite is preached; lay up your treasures here on earth because that is a God given promise. That is their message and that is the prosperity message. The disciples that eventually became apostles sure did not preach the prosperity message. But now, pastors are teaching, “Forget denying yourself, it's all about you now.” As I said before, the Lord might give you an abundance of money and possessions, but if He does, you should not forget why He gave you the blessings in the first place. Without exception, you are called and chosen to be a funnel to achieve His purposes. If you get blessings along the way, then so be it. Jesus is not a cosmic killjoy, out to ruin everyone's fun. But your attitude should not be one of thinking what you can get out of the here and now.

God wants you to have those rewards. Remember, the rewards are inexhaustible. He knows what you need in the here and now, and scripture is laden with promises that take care of your

here and now needs. But He does want you to have an attitude and a viewpoint that goes beyond the myopic viewpoint of the here and now and look at the long term outcome which never ends.

As I have shown before, Matthew 6:20 and 21 says, ***“But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart...”*** Remember, the Greek word for heart is *kardia*, which means the center and seat of spiritual life. So to restate verse 21, it could say, ***“For where your treasure is, there will your heart [or everlasting spiritual life] be also.”***

I know that a group of you do not want to understand or hear this message, because you just do not want to give. Or, if you are going to give anything at all, you want some return in the here and now. I know what is preached out there and what most people assume. You might say, “Well giving was in the law; and the law is fulfilled, therefore, I no longer have to give.” Are you not listening to what Jesus was trying to communicate? You have become deaf and blind DELIBERATELY. This teaching on giving will sort out those with this viewpoint, and it will become as clear as black and white. It becomes clear because they justify it to be so, and they are not living in the light; they are living in darkness. They are not living in *haplous* as defined in the Greek, which I will explain in a few minutes, but they are living in darkness.

One author says,

“Christ’s words were direct and profound: ‘Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also’. . . What we do with our possessions is a sure indicator what’s in our hearts. Jesus is saying, ‘Show me your check book, your credit card statement, and your receipts for cash expenditures, and I’ll show you where your heart is.’ What we do with our money doesn’t lie. It is a bold statement to God of what we truly value.

But what we do with our money doesn’t simply indicate where our heart is. According to Jesus, it determines where our heart goes. This is an amazing and exciting truth. If I want my heart to be in one particular place and not in another, then I need to put my money in that place and not in the other.

I’ve heard people say, ‘I want more of a heart for missions.’ I always respond, ‘Jesus tells you exactly how to get it. Put your money in missions, and your heart will follow.’

Do you wish you had a greater heart for the lost? Then give your money to help . . . and reach the lost. Do you want your heart to be in your church? Put your money there. Your heart will always be where your money is and not where your money isn’t.”

I have to read that again:

“Your heart will always be where your money is and not where your money isn’t.”

That is almost like the phrase, “Put your money where your mouth is.” There are a lot of professing Christians, but in the moment of truth, their true heart is quickly seen.

“If most of your money is in mutual funds, retirement, your house, or your hobby, that’s where your heart’s going to be.

Suppose you’re giving to help African children with AIDS, or you’re sponsoring a child in Haiti. When you see an article on the subject, you’re hooked. If you’re sending money to plant churches in India and an earthquake hits India, you watch the news and fervently pray. Why? Because your heart is where your treasure is.

‘My heart isn’t in all things of God.’ Is it because your treasure isn’t in the things of God? Put your resources, your assets, your money and possessions, your time and talents and energies in the things of God. As surely as the compass needle follows north, your heart will follow your treasure. Money leads; hearts follow.

After discussing the true treasures, Jesus speaks of two perspectives: ‘The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness (Matthew 6:22-23).’

Physical vision is used here as a metaphor for perspective, the way we look at life. Unbelievers look at life as a brief interval that begins at birth and ends at death. In looking to the future, they look no further than their own life span, if even that. Their vision is pitifully short and narrow, restricted to the horizons of the world. Like a myopic horse with blinders, on the person without Christ can see neither far nor wide. Bereft [or deprived] of eternal perspective, unbelievers are bound to take all the wrong turns and come to all the wrong conclusions, thinking, ‘If this life is all there is, why deny myself any pleasure or possessions?’”

That is the short term view. They do not have the long term perspective of eternity as their viewpoint. It is all about the here and now and what they can get out of it. What gives them pleasure, sucking up every little bit of pleasure they can and what they put their heart into concerning the here and now.

“Given this premise, why would they come to any other conclusion? People only live for a higher purpose when they see a higher purpose.”

Then who is responsible to show them what the higher purpose is? Politicians? News media? Lawyers? Secular teachers? I have preached in the past messages entitled, ‘Woe to the Shepherds.’ I oppose the pastors and preachers that do not live up to why they were called and chosen in the first place, which is to preach and teach, not only on this subject but other subjects also, what that higher purpose is all about, and how to be involved in it. All those preachers have produced is onlookers and do-nothings for Jesus that are only concerned with what they can achieve and what Jesus can do for them in the here and now.

The world is going to hell and the biggest contributor of that are the under-shepherds of Jesus Christ that do not challenge you to identify and reach those “higher purposes,” to use this

author's words. I could preach a watered down, or less effective, Old Testament message on giving like most do. They preach a 10% tithing message, hoping that you will give somewhere between three and five percent. Most of you pay more in taxes to the government; what an embarrassment and shame.

When you analyze the tithing and offering system in the Old Testament, it breaks down to about 23% give or take a percent or two. Do you think most preachers are going to preach that concept? They know most of the people that are sitting in front of them will say, "I'm out of here. This preacher has obviously lost his mind." The New Testament concept of giving, taught by Christ Himself, goes beyond that. He wants to see what you are made out of and how you are being transformed into Christ likeness; what the Fruit of the Spirit imputed in you has really accomplished. Remember, one of the attributes of the Fruit of the Spirit is *agathasune*. In the Greek it is not 'goodness,' as translated in the King James. *Agathasune* means 'generous giving; giving liberally; there is nothing that is going to hold you back from giving.'

There are some, who like what they are hearing, but the demand is too much and they will not stay to hear more. You had better have a desire to always seek ways of how you can give more. Most of you are stuck in the old Mosaic Law system of numbers, but God wants to see what your heart is made of. Every time you write that check and send your hard earned money or possessions in to a ministry, He is looking at your heart. If you are still asking if God wants you to have good things, of course He does! But your perspective is still on the here and now. He knows what is best for you, and if He knows what is best for you, then why would He not think in the eternal viewpoint more than what is in the here and now. Do not be stuck on the here and now. If you cannot comprehend that, then you better, because that is what He dwells on. And He has given us the information and tools in the here and now to prepare for the hereafter.

"As believers in Christ, our theology gives us perspective. It tells us that this life is the preface [or introduction] - not the book. It's the preliminaries- not the main event. It's the tune-up- not the concert.

When you're on a long airplane flight, you naturally talk to people, socialize, eat, read, pray, sleep, or maybe talk about where you're going. But what would you think if a passenger by the window seat started hanging curtains over the window, taped photographs to the seat in front of him, painted murals, and put up wall hangings? You'd think, hey, it's not that long of a trip. Once we get to the destination, none of this will matter. Even a long plane flight is short compared to the span of your entire life.

I think of our lives in terms of a dot and a line, signifying two phases. Our present life on earth is the dot. It begins . . . its brief. However, from the dot, a line extends that goes on forever. That line is eternity, which Christians will spend in heaven.

Right now we're living in the dot."

This line represents the eternity of life and of course there is no end point to it. It continues, so what you do here and now will go with you forever. FOREVER! Like I said, most of us are stuck in the here and now. That is our viewpoint and we cannot comprehend beyond the dot. But, do you trust? Do you faith? Do you believe the verifiable Word of God that there is the line? If you do, then why cannot you comprehend that what you do here and now affects everything from that point forward. This is what this author is trying to communicate here.

“I think of our lives in terms of a dot and a line, signifying two phases. Our present life on earth . . . it begins . . . it ends. It’s brief.”

Compared to eternity, there is no definition to describe how brief it is.

“However, from the dot, a line extends that goes on forever. That line is eternity, which Christians will spend in heaven.

Right now we’re living in the dot. But what are we living for? The shortsighted person lives for the dot.”

To repeat what I said before, the dot is your viewpoint; the dot is your life on earth; the dot is what you are living for. You cannot comprehend the line, and by doing that you are saying you do not trust and you do not have faith that the line exists. You are pretending to be a Christian here, because you cannot comprehend the line. Jesus says, “Trust Him,” and if you trust Him the line exists. If the line exists, He’s telling us to put our treasures there, not in the dot.

“The shortsighted person lives for the dot. The person with perspective lives for the line. This earth, and our time here, is the dot. Our beloved Bridegroom, the coming wedding, the Great Reunion, and our eternal home in the New Heavens and New Earth . . . they’re all on the line.

The person who lives for the dot lives for treasures on earth that end in junkyards. The person who lives for the line lives for treasures in heaven that never ends. [The inexhaustible rewards]

Giving is living for the line.

We’ll each part with our money. The only question is when. We have no choice but to part with it later. But we do have the choice whether to part with it now. We can keep earthly treasures for the moment, and we may get some temporary enjoyment from it. But if we give it away, we’ll enjoy eternal treasures that will never be taken from us.

Foolish people live for the dot. Wise people live for the line.

It's all about perspective. The believer's view of reality should be radically different than the nonbeliever's.

And believe me, even to Christians, this sounds radical. Preachers and the pastors are to blame, because they have diminished the Word of God so their congregations can accept it, and they will be accountable for that.

Imagine if you lived in Jesus' day and He just taught you this concept. Then, He sends you on a mission to preach this concept. Even though you believe this is the truth, you do not know how the crowd will react to it, because it is fanatically extreme, even beyond a Mosaic Law's system of giving. So you decide to water it down, dilute it, so the message becomes acceptable. What do you think Christ would have done when He heard about it? Today, we have preachers, pastors, and many individuals that only have the viewpoint of their life on earth, the dot. They do not see the ramifications of what will happen on that line of eternity. They have become myopic. Foolish people live for the dot. And what is more evil? Preachers have been preaching that it is okay to live for the dot. Wise people live for the line. It is all about perspective.

"The believer's view of reality should be radically different than the nonbeliever's. We should live differently because we see differently. We witness the same current events, but interpret them differently. We eat the same food, exchange the same currency, but live according to two different purposes. These purposes are based squarely on two different perspectives- one that looks at life in the short run and the other that looks at life in the long run.

When our eyes are set on eternity, the news that someone has come to know the Savior means a great deal more than, the news of a salary raise or the prospect of getting the latest high-tech gadget. Of course, the salary raise, and perhaps the gadget, can be used for the Kingdom of God. But the point is that neither one in itself is ultimately important, whereas new birth, which affects the eternal destiny of a precious human being, is vitally important.

The Christian who accumulates lands and houses and bank accounts but doesn't invest in eternity isn't depicted by Jesus in his sermon as unrighteous, greedy or selfish- though he might be any or all of these. Rather, he's depicted as shortsighted. Blind. Unwise is too weak of a word- this person is stupid, stupid on the grandest scale, as stupid as the rich fool of Luke 12. As stupid as the man who found the treasure in the field would have been to hold on to his paltry possessions instead of trading them in for what was far greater value."

And why are they stupid according to this author? Why are they shortsighted? Why are they blinded? Look at Matthew 6:22 and 23. These verses give us further details to distinguish the problem. The verses read, ***"The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!"***

In the previous chapter, I preached on this verse and pointed out in verse 22 the word ‘single.’ The Greek word is *‘haplous’*, but the definition is not ‘single.’ Remember, the previous verses 19 to 21, and all the verses after 22 are still talking about money and possessions. Why would Jesus just in that one sentence divert to another subject? He did not. The eye is the window by which light gets into the whole body. If the window or eye is clear, it is going to illuminate everywhere. But the light would be hindered if it were frosted, colored or dirty or in darkness.

“The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single [or haplous], thy whole body shall be full of light.”

There is another thought in this section coming from the word which the King James translators rendered ‘single’ and the New English founders rendered ‘sound.’ But in some texts the word means ‘simple or simplicity.’ However, other texts say that the only proper translation is ‘generosity.’ That is what **haplous** means, ‘generosity,’ and some Greek dictionaries define the word **haplous** as ‘simplicity as manifested in generous giving.’ Other translators recognized this truth when they came to the 12th chapter of Romans, verse 8. The same kind of language is used there. In that verse the word ‘simplicity’ used in the King James Version some translators changed to ‘liberality.’ So the text now reads “...*he that giveth let him do it with liberality*”; in other words, ‘very generously.’

Verse 22 refers to money and possessions. Not the nonsense a lot of authors and commentators like to enlighten you with that is incorrect. Verse 22 has always been about money and possessions and it has always been about how to give God’s way.

Now, verse 22 can be read as, ***“The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be generous, the whole body shall be full of light.”***

Nothing is going to restrain you or stop you from the act of giving. You will not be hindered because you cannot see. You will be seeing clearly because you will be illuminated. Not only will you be illuminated, but watch and see if others do not get illuminated by what you are doing, because they get to hear the Word of God. Not to mention how much it pleases the Lord that you are being obedient to His instruction.

To continue, verse 23 it reads, ***“But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness...”*** Circle that word ‘darkness.’ ‘Darkness’ was a particular common word that was used at that time to describe a certain condition, especially at night, meaning it was so dark you could not even see in front of you. Therefore, the darkness would restrain your progress in going from point A to point B, because you have been restrained or stopped. You have been overcome by something. In this case, it was used at the time as **‘darkness,’** and that is why the King James translators decided to use the word darkness here. In other words, you are in the dark and you cannot see the true meaning of anything, especially about giving, and you are lost. You are walking around in total darkness.

In verse 22, the eye is the window by which light would be generous, so “...*thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil* [or not generous], *thy whole body shall be full of darkness...*” This particular verse is also about money and possessions.

I remember preaching this before. In the 26 Translations Bible, I was curious to see how many of the 26 translators would even want to deal with this particular verse. I only found two. The one translator that really stood out was Moffat. His translation is “...*so if your eye were generous.*” Why should it be generous? Because you are laying up treasures in heaven not here on earth. If you lay up your treasures here on earth, then you are in darkness. “*If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!*” In other words, the tighter your wallet, the more reluctant you are to give, and the harder you hang on to your possessions, the more darkness you will have.

These are hard-hitting words, but what do you think Jesus was saying? Do you think He was trying to confuse you or to bring clarity to the subject matter? These are His words. **Haplous** in the Greek is ‘generous,’ not ‘single.’ He is looking to see where your heart is by the way you generously give to ministries and churches that feed you the Word of God. In addition, if you give with the right attitude, your heart is seated and centered on His Word that gives you spiritual life. Then you will be living in the light that illuminates your whole body.

I have asked this question before, “Do you want to live in the light or do you want to live in darkness?” Those are the two choices. Those are the two perspectives. One deals with the here and now only. The other is a viewpoint of eternity, which is that line that never ends.

Are you accumulating riches in heaven or here on earth? You can accumulate them in heaven by giving to the ministry that gives you light and hope by teaching the Word of God. That has always been God’s plan.

If you are not laying your treasures up in heaven, you have a sight problem; you have an eternal viewpoint problem. You have chosen the wrong perspective about how to view these scriptures. This is why you do not hear these verses preached on that often. These scriptures force you to make a decision. But once you have heard the truth, you either have to go about trying to disprove everything I am saying, or reject it completely, which places you in darkness; in darkness. You have become your own restraining force. You have become the one that makes your life so dark that you cannot even take another step, because you cannot see anything in front of you except your own viewpoint, which has darkened your path.

Yes, it is shortsighted. Yes, you are blind. Yes, as this author says, ‘it’s just plain stupid’ to make that choice.

“The one with good eyes, the one with eternal perspective, is accurate in his or her appraisal of what is important. Like the poor widow in Mark 12, this person is eternally wise. With vision corrected by biblical ‘laser surgery . . .”

That is the kind of Lasik you need if you are in darkness. A “Biblical ‘laser surgery’” to take you from a blinded state to one that really does see the light. This person is eternally wise with vision corrected by “Biblical ‘laser surgery,’” not only on this topic, but in just about every topic.

“. . . this person sees life through the eyes of eternity. Unlike the average person, the believer stares through the haze and peers beyond the horizons of this world to another.”

They are no longer on the viewpoint or the here and now, the dot on the line. They are trusting and faithing in Jesus Christ and they understand what He presents in Matthew 6:19; that our treasures are to be stored in heaven, for our benefit, because that is His promise. We will receive benefits in Heaven, but in the here and now others will benefit also by hearing the Good News concerning salvation and grace through Jesus Christ alone. And if you have that viewpoint you are no longer stuck in this dot viewpoint. You are now on this line; this line of heaven which has a life eternal viewpoint.

You are in a **haplous** condition, not in a lukewarm condition, as a Christian.

The choice is yours. I have presented you the truth. Go try to disprove it. These are not my words. I know once I start preaching on New Testament giving and start peeling off the layers of Old Testament giving, which is just the standard, it is going to affect some of you and some of you are going to rebel. Some of you are not going to listen and some of you are going to open your hearts. I have already seen some of those results like never before.

The question is which one the two perspectives are you going to choose?

To be continued...

Two Perspectives

Part 2

Open your Bibles to Matthew chapter 6. I have been preaching on Matthew 6:19-23, but before moving on, I want to reflect on some additional thoughts concerning the Two Perspectives.

First, let us quickly review what the Two Perspectives are. Most individuals believe that there is a hereafter, that there is life in eternity, but they do not know how to or want to prepare themselves for the future. But, one way or another you are going to experience it. Hopefully that future is with Jesus Christ, receiving the inexhaustible rewards and benefits that He has promised us. However, the problem is that most people live on the dot. The dot represents our time here on this planet. Most people are focused in only on the dot which represents our life here on earth. They live only with that perspective. Let us just call this the First Perspective, as seen in the example below.



The Second Perspective, the line, symbolizes eternity. The dot has a beginning and it has an end but the line continues forever. So we have the dot, the here and now, and the line, which is life in eternity, that goes on forever. Those are the Two Perspectives.

Most people never want to apply this to giving. They think any significance it has is in a spiritual level with only earthy application. They do not consider that giving either of oneself or possessions is a spiritual act of worship, which also has eternal benefits.

We can see examples in the Book of Hebrews, chapter 11. The people in that chapter are called the heroes of faith by most Christians. We all have read at one time in our journey about those giants in the faith and wished and whisper to ourselves saying, "Oh I wish I could be like them. I wish I had what they had." Well, I am telling you that you can be like them. However, you have to come to the realization that they had a Two-Perspective concept. They lived on the dot because that is where God placed them and they had certain responsibilities on the dot, which was their lifetime here on earth. These were not only their physical responsibilities to themselves and to others, but also the preparation in their spiritual responsibilities that would take them throughout life in eternity, which is on that eternal line referenced in the above example.

Every one of these characters in Hebrews 11 had a Two-Perspective concept and understanding. As they grew in the faith, they stood fast in the promises of God. They started preparing

themselves for eternity, which is the line. Even though they were still here on earth, they started preparing for the line. Let us go to Hebrews 11:13. ***“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”*** Even though they were living their lives on the dot here on earth, they came to the understanding that they were strangers, they were pilgrims on a journey seeking a better country.

Verse 14 and 15 continue, ***“For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.”*** In other words, if they went back to believing that there is just a here and now, that this life is all we have to live for, they would be mindful to go back to the eternal perspective. That is what is said in verse 16, ***“But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.”***

What kind of perspective did they have? They understood they were on the dot but the dot was just a temporary place. They were preparing for eternity. Why? They desired and looked for a better country. They preparing for eternity (the line), while on the journey in the here and now (the dot). In addition, look how the Lord responds to their correct perspective. ***“...God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city.”***

Let us look at another example in 1st Peter, chapter 1:3-9. ***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope [or literally ‘warm hope’] by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance... [In other words, something that you are going to receive] incorruptible...”*** Peter is referring to our treasures in heaven. They are incorruptible; Matthew 6 tells us that neither thieves nor moth could get to it. In other words, it cannot be destroyed. It cannot become corrupt. Verse 3 continues ***“...lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away...”***

I preached on the inexhaustible treasures of heaven. You cannot use them up (‘reserved’ is a better translation) and they are watched over in heaven, ***“...who are kept...Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”***

So what is going to be revealed in the last time? Our salvation is revealed to us now, so what is Peter referring to? According to the scriptures we know we will receive a crown of glory as part of our inheritance. But why are the rewards for giving never included here when these scriptures are referred to? I proclaim that giving should also be included! I am not saying it should be the only thing, but it should also be included because Matthew 6:19 by Jesus’ own words declared ***“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.”*** Lay it up there because according to 1st Peter, it is watched over. It is not going to ever fade away. It is in heaven for you, waiting for the time to be revealed. Salvation is revealed now. If it was not, you would not trust; you would not faith in Christ Jesus. We have this assurance; that the blood of Jesus Christ covered our sins. He was the promised sacrificial lamb that was unblemished.

No other sacrifices were necessary. Christ fulfilled it all, our sins, our trespasses; they are all covered in Him, by Him, through Him. All we have to do is trust Him, have confidence in Him, keep growing, keep being persuaded by what we originally heard is true. Never let anything distract you from that wonderful news called The Good News, which turned your life around. Paul said in Ephesians chapter 1:13 and 14 that we have a partial payment of the Holy Spirit now. ***“In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest [literally ‘a down payment’] of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.”*** I do not even know what it is going to be like when I have a full payment. We have some payments or promises or inheritance that we can claim now and salvation is one of them. So in 1st Peter it cannot just be referring to salvation here, can it? But that is how most read it and understand it.

Go back to 1st Peter, verse 5, ***“Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”*** Heavenly inheritance, verse 4 will never perish. They had that viewpoint. They were looking for a better country. Why? Because they were not satisfied with this country (the dot) once they heard the Good News. Once they came to the knowledge of what the Word of God says, they realized the dot is a temporary journey and training ground. They wanted to live and prepare for the life on the line, life eternal. They understood when they finally would arrive at that better country, there was a heavenly inheritance waiting for them that will never perish.

Go to Romans 8:18. What did Paul say? Once again, back to the beginning of the Two Perspectives, the dot and the line. Most of them, once they came to the knowledge of the truth, lived on the line. ***“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”*** What is Paul saying there? The sufferings of this present time cannot be compared to what is coming.

2nd Corinthians 4:17-18 is where Paul declares ***“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”*** Make yourself a mental note and never forget that the things we go through on the dot, this life on earth, is **nothing** compared to the things that we are going to receive. Adam lost our inheritance, but Christ regained it for us. However, we have to trust and have faith in Him to see its fulfillment, which is not yet completed. ***“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, [one perspective] but at the things which are not seen [The other perspective]: for the things which are seen are temporal [Things of this earth, the dot]; but the things which are not seen are eternal”*** [The line, life in eternity.]

Over and over you see the same concept of these Two Perspectives. The momentary verses the eternal, troubles verses glory. You might have troubles here. You might have afflictions, but they are nothing compared to the glory that we will receive and the benefits we will get once we are on the line. Look beyond sacrifices to rewards. These are the concepts these individuals in the Bible lived by. You see it over and over from Genesis to the Book of Revelation. They did not keep their mind on the moment. They went beyond that. They saw the eternal perspective. They did not just keep their mind on their troubles. They went through their troubles knowing that the

Lord would be there with them no matter what the outcome would be, because at the other end there is a crown of glory that has been promised. They did not see it as a sacrifice only, they went beyond that. They saw benefits and the rewards that would come by it.

Momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs all the troubles. That was the perspective Paul was proclaiming in verse 17. ***“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”*** Momentary troubles are achieving for us, whether you like them or not. And if you keep trusting and faithing in Him, they are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs all afflictions. There is no comparison. You cannot compare these two. To do it is to not to see the truth and leaves you living in a blind state that cannot see the differences.

All these giants of faith in scripture, no matter how many times they stumbled put their focus on what was promised, not just here on earth. They longed and prepared for a better country, because they knew their heavenly inheritance was coming over there. They lived with an eternal perspective, not just the here and now perspective.

One author says it this way:

“[Bible characters] view the present in light of the future. [They] see time in light of eternity. . . Paul speaks not of a glory achieved for Christ but for us. Likewise, Jesus didn’t say, ‘Store up for God treasures in heaven’; he said, ‘Store up for yourselves. . .’”

‘Treasures in heaven’ is what Christ was referring to in Matthew 6:20. We just read it in the King James where it says, ***“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves (for yourselves) treasures in heaven...”*** How many times have you read by that section and not noticed the term ‘for yourselves’? You may think, “Well, I am giving to God for His glory.” I have heard that a million times, but no, you are not. All you have is His to start with, so what are you giving Him in the first place? Let me read that again. I want this to sink in.

“Likewise, Jesus didn’t say, ‘Store up for God treasures in heaven’; he said, ‘Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. . . Christ will be glorified as the soul object of our worship in heaven. Scripture teaches that we will not only behold His glory but also participate in it. This gives the believer an incentive to do what the Philippian Christians did in giving to Paul’s missionary work- withdrawing . . . from their earthly accounts in order to have them credited to their heavenly account (Philippians 4:17).

Suppose you disliked split pea soup but I told you that if you would eat split pea soup for a week, I would provide you and your family with all the groceries you needed for the rest of your lives. Wouldn’t this promise change your perspective on eating split pea soup? You still might not like it, but you would gladly eat it in light of a promised reward (and you might even develop a taste for it). This is an example of delayed gratification. Soldiers, athletes, and farmers all know that short-term sacrifices are justifiable in the light of their long-term benefits (2 Timothy 2:3-6). This same principle applies to those who adopt an eternal perspective.

Suppose I offered you \$1000 to spend today however you want. Not a bad deal. But suppose I give you a choice- you can either have that \$1000 today, or you can have ten million dollars if you'll wait one year- then ten million more every year thereafter.

Only a fool would take the \$1000 today. Yet that's what we do whenever we grab onto what will only last for a moment [The things that pertain to the dot.], fore-going something far more valuable we could enjoy later for much longer. A year may seem a long time to wait. But after it's done- as when our lives here are done- it will seem like it passed quickly.

The money God entrusts to us is eternal investment capital. Every day is an opportunity to buy up more shares in his kingdom.

You can't take it with you but you can send it on ahead. It's a revolutionary concept . . .

Financial planners have a hard time convincing people to look ahead instead of focusing on today, this week, or this year. [They try to convince you to] 'Think thirty years from now.' Then they'll share ways to prepare for thirty years from now by planning, budgeting, saving, contributing to an IRA, investing in this mutual fund or that real estate partnership. But the truth is, thinking thirty years ahead is only slightly less shortsighted than thinking 30 days ahead. Wise people think ahead not just to retirement years, merely to the end of their earthly life, but to eternity. We shouldn't say, 'Think thirty years ahead,' but 'Think thirty million years ahead.'

Financial counselors point out the difference between investing the same yearly amounts in an Individual Retirement Account starting at age twenty-five or age forty. At retirement, the bottom-line difference is huge. This is a good insight for the Christian who is storing up for eternity: The sooner you get started, the more you'll have awaiting you.

A financial counselor will say, 'You can't go back at age sixty-five and snap your fingers to compensate for forty years of poor planning.' But what's far more important is that you can't reach the end of your life, snap your fingers, and compensate for a lifetime of poor planning to meet God. The rich fool is proof of that.

God's eternal prospectus bears a careful look in the light of its guaranteed rate of interest. Jesus promises an ultimate return of a hundred times- a 10,000 percent rate of interest that lasts forever. Jesus promises an ultimate return of 100 times 10,000% rate of interest that lasts forever (Matthew 19:29). What earthly investment compares to that?

Based on Christ's words, let me assume the role of 'eternal financial counselor' and offer some advice: Choose your investments carefully, compare rates of interest, and evaluate how your investments will be working for you a few million years from now.

Unbelievers see with what Jesus called the 'bad eye.' The Christian's view of finances, seen through a 'good eye,' should be radically different. True, we may participate in some of the earthly investments as unbelievers. Occasionally our short-term goals will appear similar. But our long-term goals and purposes should be fundamentally different."

Before I conclude this chapter let us go to Matthew 19:25-30. I have heard this preached every

way possible and have read everything about these verses that is available. Here in Matthew, Jesus was dealing with a rich young ruler telling him to sell everything he had. ***“When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying Who then can be saved? (Verse 25)”*** The rich man said he was keeping the law the best way he could. He had been doing the things Jesus said that pertained to the law. And then Jesus said to him, Sell everything you have ***“and give to the poor and thou shall have treasures in heaven and come and follow me (Matthew 19:21).”*** Of course, everyone wants to relate giving to the poor as giving to the Red Cross or some kind of foundation that just deals with the poor. I have nothing against those organizations, but that is not what is being said here in these verses. The rich young ruler was to sell everything he had and follow Christ. And, by the way, Jesus was going to be the one that distributed the money, not the other way around. Christ says in verse 21, ***“If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shall have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.”*** Sell what you have, join up with us, and distribute your possessions to the poor. Unfortunately, the rich man turned away saddened, because he did not want to give up his 'great possessions' (verse 22). Then verse 25 continues, ***“When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible. Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?”***

His disciples were saying, “Well, we have done that. What do we have to show for it?” Really? Are you sure that you have nothing to show for it? You are following Jesus, you are being fed, and you are being supplied for, which He promised in Matthew 6. He has not reneged on His word. Let me give you a promise that Jesus delivers in the next few verses. This is a promise not only to these disciples, but to all of us. ***“Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory...”*** (Verse 27-28).

When is this going to happen? Jesus did not say it was going to happen in the here and now. Jesus did not point to the dot, this life on earth. How many times have you heard this preached or read somewhere declaring these promises are for the here and now? They are not! Keep scripture in context. No matter how tempting it might be to hear or deliver a giving message on earthy prosperity, keep scripture in context. The disciples said, ***“...we have forsaken all and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?”*** Jesus was referring to a future time that has not come yet for them at that point when He said in verse 28 and 29, ***“...when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. [This has not happened yet even in our time.] And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, [That is 10,000 %] and shall inherit everlasting life.”***

In this verse there is no clause where you ***“...shall receive a hundredfold...”*** in the here and now. In context it is still 'yet to come' in the eternal life mentioned earlier; everlasting life. ***“But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.”*** (Verse 30) The ones that understand the concept of true giving are the ones that are going to be first to receive the benefits and rewards that are spoken of here. ***“... and the last. . .”*** Jesus will obviously deal with them.

Then, chapter 20 goes on to the parable of the laborers and He brings rewards up again. How often these verses are used for the here and now nonsense. It is scripture picking to preach a message that gets you excited by what you can receive now. If you do not live in a 'Two-Perspective' frame of mind, you are just living for the here and now. These promises in Matthew 19:27-30 are for people who are living on the line. These promises are not for the delivery of those benefits now here on this earth. The promises are coming in that regeneration period, and eternity is a very long time if you really think about it. I do not know about you, but we are going to receive a hundredfold of all the things that He mentioned.

These promises are to go with us throughout eternity, on the line. They are not for the here and now, but a time that is still to come.

1st Peter made it very clear. It is incorruptible. It is coming. It is part of our inheritance and Christ wants you to receive the full benefit of it on the line (eternity). Correct giving based on God's word is part of God's structural order, but we are the beneficiary in the long run.

To be continued...

JUDGMENTS

Open your Bibles to the New Testament, Colossians 3:1 and remind yourself daily what Paul is instructing here in this verse. *“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above...”*

According to Matthew 6 we know one of the things that we are supposed to seek is treasures in heaven. That is where we began in this series. Furthermore, Jesus tells us to seek those treasures for yourself which are going to benefit us in heaven. Does it have additional meaning of benefiting others in the here and now? Sure, it does. How do you think you are going to receive those treasures up in heaven, if you are not willing to spend it in the here and now? And this is done by participating, so others can start coming to the knowledge of the truth just as you did. *“...seek those things which are above...”* The word 'above' is 'ano' in the Greek. It is the opposite of 'below.' Remember how this series started?



In the above illustration the dot, which represents the earth also represents the 'below' in Colossians chapter 3. The line, which never ends in our illustration, represents eternity that never ends, and that is the 'above' that is referred to in the Colossian letter.

“If ye then be risen with Christ seek those things which are above [ano]...” Not the things that are below and in the here and now *“...where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.”* Verse 2 continues by saying, *“Set your affection on...”* Make it a priority goal or objective is a better translation. Set your mind on this goal, on the things that are above, things in eternity. Even though we are living in the here and now, the **way** we are living in the here and now is not what the Lord had originally intended for us. This was one major mistake by Adam and Eve, to put it to you plain and simple. A big hiccup, or problem in God's plan for us. Sin interrupted, introduced by Satan, tempting Adam and Eve, who as a result, placed us in the condition that God never intended us to be in. Nevertheless, this is where we find ourselves. However, when compared to eternity, this journey in the here and now is very short. If you are one that professes to want to have the mind of Christ, seeking those things which are above *“where CHRIST sitteth on the right hand of God”*, then why are you so wrapped up in the things below? Christ will take care of you, just as He does the birds and the plant life. Do they keep on existing? What assistance do they need from us? They survive. Why, because the Lord is their supply. If not, we would have one barren world to live in. Make it a goal to have your mind on the things that are above, not just on things in the here and now. That dot represents just a blink of an eye compared to the never-ending existence of eternity.

In past chapters, I have been reading and looking at other sources, eliminating some, and reading only portions of others. No matter what other source I use, scripture makes it very clear that the one central business of this life, this short amount of years that we have here on this dot, is to

prepare us for the next life, which never ends. Unfortunately, most people do not look at giving that way. These days, people give their money and possessions with the expectancy that God owes them something. That belief is mostly brought on by false teachers. I will expose their false doctrines, presenting how wrong and evil it is. The question you need to ask yourself is has the central business of your life been preparing for the next life.

I have had parents ask me to pray for them because they cannot control their 17 year old child. In my experiences with parents, I have seen their lack of effort in teaching their children preparation for eternity with Christ or the consequences without Him. There are two components of it: eternity with Christ, or hell, which leads to the lake of fire.

Often I get amused listening to people saying that everything is going to be equal in heaven, and everything is also going to be equal in hell and the lake of fire. You 'hippies for Jesus' have been misled or you have misled yourselves. It is not going to be all for one and one for all at either location. In this I necessarily do not even blame the parents. I blame lackluster preachers and pastors that just do not want to instruct their congregations with the knowledge parents can pass on to their children.

I can hear you mumbling to yourselves that you taught them about Christ's grace and salvation. I know that is where it has to start and that is why evangelists are so important. You need to hear and receive the message of salvation and grace. People need to be rescued from an eternity of damnation. But once they are rescued, people need growth and further instructions. The tragedy of even the ones that preach the correct message is they merely say 'just have faith.' I am not preaching that faith is not important and necessary in your everyday journey here on the dot. However, faith is not the only thing you should be concerned with when preparing for your next life, especially with what Christ has promised to give us when we get there. And if you do not know what those promises are, it only leads back to my point, it is back to lazy preaching.

There are not that many preachers that want to preach that you are going to hell and eventually the lake of fire if you are not in Christ. That is just too much of a turn off these days. They must think that there is some other way to coerce you into the Kingdom. I often wonder if you read the same scriptures that I read, because it is Christ or nothing. There is no other choice or way. He, Christ, is the only way. Christ has provided the truth and in Him is eternal life. Over and over in the Old and New Testament that is the message. Either you are dull of hearing or blind to see it, but it is there. More than likely you have just rejected it. Your faith needs to be in Jesus Christ and nothing else. You can have faith when dealing with life on the dot, but you must also understand that you need faith to prepare for the things of eternity.

Most base the faith component on just your trials and tribulations; whether you are having a bad day and trusting Christ to get you through. I have no problem with that, but that is just one element of faith and how it should be exercised. That is not all that is needed for preparing you for the next life. And, by the way, this has nothing to do with salvation.

Some who read this will twist my words and find an excuse to turn me off without getting the total message of what I have been proclaiming for many years now; the message from the verifiable Word of God. Instead, they are using just a part of every day's exercise of faith; because that is all preachers instruct them to do. But that is not all of it. It is like the sermon I

preached on rewards. I had people respond and say, “I am not sure what it [the rewards] are, but I will be glad to get there.” Either pastors do not know, or pastors are not that concerned and excited to teach it to you to let you know what these rewards are. Again, it is back to neglect from pastors and preachers.

I have told you Christianity has been in the dark for very long time. The return of the Lord Jesus Christ is at hand and so few are prepared. Even the most mature Christians are not as prepared as they think they are. I am not saying they are going to hell or damnation. No! Christ paid the price for our salvation, but what I am saying is do not miss out on the rewards once you get there.

To illustrate this, let me continue reading from another author.

“As no piece of a puzzle can be understood apart from the greater context of the full puzzle, so our present lives- including what we should do with all our money and possessions- cannot be understood apart from the greater context of eternity. . . Many have been taught a few things about the Tribulation and the Antichrist and have certain beliefs that fit their particular cosmic eschatology. But we tend to be very vague about our personal eschatology’s, the eternal futures awaiting each of us. The only certainty seems to be that if we know Christ as Savior we’ll be in heaven. We might say, ‘Just knowing I’ll be in heaven is good enough for me.’”

How many of you have been guilty of that? Be honest with yourself. I am not getting on your case, or condemning you. I am just saying that it is the practice we fall into, because of our low expectations, because of the lack of knowledge of what God’s Word says on the subject matter.

“The only certainty seems to be that if we know Christ as Savior will be in heaven. We might say, ‘Just knowing I’ll be in heaven is good enough for me.’ Apparently, however, it isn’t good enough for God. His Word tells us specifically about other aspects of our personal futures. And many readers will find them quite different than what they’ve supposed.”

See, what you refuse to believe is that you can be and I can be (no one is immune) disqualified from future rewards. This has nothing to do with getting to heaven, because salvation is based on your faith and trust in Christ and His redemptive work on that cross. You cannot do anything to earn that. I have made that clear, so do not ever twist my words. You cannot earn your salvation. It is a free gift from Jesus Christ Himself. It is a gift of grace.

Many take the second coming for granted or even your death before His second coming for granted based on the promise of salvation. That is true and there is nothing wrong with that, but why do you want to miss out on all that has been promised? Why do you want to be disqualified from future rewards? You will not have any excuse by the time I am done with this series. You may think this is such a different and hard message. That some people will not stay to listen to it. For every thousand that leaves, if one learns from the message, to God be the glory. How fortunate they will be. They will not be disqualified from their future rewards in His Kingdom. You may wonder if this is all found in the scripture. Absolutely! Even if you have read the Bible many times and never seen this, then you better stick around. You need to learn what scriptures instruct us about giving. Let us continue.

“The only certainty seems to be that if we know Christ as Savior will be in heaven. We might say, “Just knowing I’ll be in heaven is good enough for me.” Apparently, however, it isn’t good enough for God. His Word tells us specifically about other aspects of our personal futures. And many readers will find them quite different than what they’ve supposed . . . ‘Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment (Hebrews 9:27).’”

You may think you are not going to face judgment. And you will not as far as sin is concern, if you are in Christ. Of that, you are absolutely one hundred percent correct. No argument from me. There is plenty of scripture to verify that. You have to be in Christ, you have to be covered by His blood. However, everyone looks at the word judgment and says, “Ugh, it is an ugly word. That is a horrifying word.” Almost everyone believes that if you are going to face a judgment that it will lead you to hell or eventually to the lake of fire. You are absolutely right, if you are not in Christ. However what about heaven’s judgment? Has it become an ugly word or has it become a word that distinguishes what you have been qualified or disqualified for in the basis of rewards? Think about it. ***“Man is destined to die once and after that to face judgment.”***

“The old saying, 'Nothing is certain but death and taxes,' is only half true, since there are tax evaders, but no death evaders. Those alive at the return of Christ may not technically die, but the result will be the same- their earthly lives will abruptly end, and they will move immediately to the afterlife.

[In the Book of Hebrews it states in] ***our written-in-stone itinerary- man is destined to die ‘and after that to face judgment.’ This judgment is for all men, not some.”***

Some will be either at the White Throne Judgment or the Judgment Seat of Christ. Both places will have judgments and Christ will determine your forever, your life in eternity.

“...judgment is for all men, not some.”

The Judgment Seat of Christ is not a judgment about whether your sins have been forgiven. That work has been done, you are in. However, you have a problem that keeps the Lord from blessing you with inexhaustible rewards. If your attitude is just, “Well as long as I got in.” That is not what the Lord has destined for you. Yes, you will get in, but He wants so much more for us. When He originally created Adam and Eve, they were supposed to rule and reign along with their descendants. Sin interrupted that. Instead of rewards and blessings they got toil and misery. In heaven there will not be any toil and misery, no matter what level of rewards in heaven you will receive. But the Lord Jesus Christ wants you to attain **all** of the rewards that He originally intended for us; especially the ones that we can see through God’s Word.

Remove this 'everything is equal in heaven' idea out of your preconceived thoughts about the eternal future. It is not scriptural. There is no equality, not only in heaven, but also in hell and the lake of fire. Everyone is not going to experience the same eternal life or death. You may find this shocking. Most have been so stuck, because of preachers not having the guts to tell you the truth. I think the truth will rise to the top. Once people know the truth, the verifiable scriptural truth, and if their hearts and mind are in Christ, they will want more. My prayer is that you will start thinking and seeking the things that are above and that you will have the right spirit with an

attitude that says you want more, you want to know all the possible benefits for your future in eternity. Most of you have loved ones on the dot. Don't you want the best for them down here? What do you think Christ wants for you? Don't you want your loved ones to have all the rewards in eternity? How are they going to learn about them unless it is from you? That is, if they do not listen to a preacher that preaches the message of eternal rewards.

I am trying to shake you out of your doldrums that you have been in. I can feel some of you saying to yourselves, "I am just waiting for the Lord to return." You really think that is the attitude Christ wants you to have? Of course He wants you to be passionate about His return, but between here and to that point He has work for you to do. He has things you are responsible for and to participate in, which represents the things that are above. What do you think you are going to do in heaven? Sit on a cloud and float around all day long? Some of you might like that concept, but that is not what heaven is all about.

"This judgment is for all men, not some. Whether we go to Christ in death or He comes to us in His return, we face judgment. This doctrine is as old as the church itself. The statement, 'Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead,' found its way into the Apostles' Creed (AD400).

There seems to be built into every person, society, and religion, a basic belief that good deserves reward and evil deserves punishment, and both will ultimately get what they deserve. God has written his moral law on human hearts (Romans 2:12-16). This includes an inborn sense that one day we will be judged in the light of [some supreme being, which is Jesus Christ]. Scripture confirms this inbred human expectation of judgment. It says God will judge everyone (Acts 17:31), and He will judge fairly (genesis 18:25). Specifically, he will judge us according to our deeds. . ."

Some will translate 'deeds' and 'works.' There are different words for 'works' in the New Testament, but the one in this particular verse includes your involvement in something, usually in the employment of something. In the classical Greek, it was 'the employment of what you were involved in in the business world.' Used as a Biblical reference, it is 'the employment of The Word of God,' which should be the most important thing you could employ yourself in. The word employment in this case is 'ergon' in the Greek. ***"Specifically, he will judge us according to our deeds,***[No, not deeds, but ***employment of the Word.***] In the Book of Revelation, the ones that are going to be in hell and the lake of fire are the ones that **lack** the employment of the Word in their life first and foremost.

"I, the Lord, search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve' (Jeremiah 17:10). [Here, 'participation' is a more accurate translation.] ***'Does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he hath done? Will He pay back harm for the harm they have done (Proverbs 24:12).***

All men should live each day with this awesome awareness: 'But they will have to give an account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead (1 Peter 4:5).'"

It is the spiritually dead that is referenced. This is referring to future judgments and places of judgment. One is the White Throne judgment and the other the Judgment Seat of Christ. **"Who**

shall give account to him that is ready to judge...” the spiritually alive ones and the spiritually dead ones. Who is going to sit in that seat? Who said it was going to happen? The answer is Jesus Christ.

***“God will judge us with total knowledge: ‘Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is covered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account (Hebrews 4:13).*”**

There again, that is the Hebrew message in chapter 4 verse 11: ***“Let us labor* (expect yourselves to labor) *therefore to enter into that rest,* (that means you will be working here) *lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. For the word of God is quick* [alive], *and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.”***

Some will ask, “You mean the Lord sees everything? The Lord is keeping a record book?” What do you think the Book of Remembrance is referring to? There is a record being kept. But not whether you earned the right to get to heaven. If you believe that Christ died for your sins, you are in. The record is being kept for all the rewards He wants us to have when we get there. We need to come to the understanding that we also need to start living and preparing for the things that are above and not what is just below.

***“Because his knowledge is total, his judgment is comprehensive and detailed: ‘Men will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for every careless word that is spoken (Matthew 12:36).*”**

***His judgment extends to what is hidden to others ‘God will bring every deed [No, it is ‘employment of the word in your life] into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil’ (Ecclesiastes 12:14). He even knows the motives of men’s hearts and judges us in that light (1 Corinthians 4:5).*”**

***We are all sinners and the wages of sin is death (Romans 3:23; 6:23). But an all-holy God, out of love for us, judged Jesus for our sins (Isaiah 53:9-10). Only by embracing Christ’s atonement for our sins can we escape the everlasting punishment due us (Romans 6:23; 2 Corinthians 5:21). God’s justice was satisfied, but only at the cost of his own blood. To purchase our redemption, Jesus experienced an eternity of hell in the few hours on the cross. Our Lord said, ‘To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life’ (Revelation 21:6). Without cost to us, but at unimaginable cost to him- a cost that will be visible for eternity, as we behold his nail-scarred hands and feet (John 20:24-19). Bonheoffer was right: grace is free, but it is not cheap.*”**

***Hell is a place of punishment designed for Satan and the fallen angels (Matthew 25:41-46)’ Revelation 20:10). However, it will also be inhabited by those who do not accept God’s gift of redemption in Christ (Revelation 20:12-15).*”**

***Hell is an actual place, clearly and graphically spoken of by Jesus (Matthew 10:28; Matthew 13:40 -42; Mark 9:43-44). Hell is as literal as heaven (Psalm 11:4-6), and despite recent*”**

claims to the contrary (even among some evangelicals), as eternal as heaven (Matthew 25:46). [Both have their place throughout eternity.] Hell is a horrible place of suffering and everlasting destruction (Matthew 13:41-42; 2 Thessalonians 1-9). In hell, people are fully conscious and retain all their capacities and desires with no hope for any fulfillment for all eternity (Luke 16:22-31).

Hell is indescribably dreadful. If you trust the Bible, we must realize that hell is undeniably real. Hell is something most of us do not want to believe in, but who are we to tell God He is wrong? He so wants us not to go to hell that he paid the ultimate price so we wouldn't have to. Nevertheless, apart from trusting Christ for salvation, any person's eternal future will be spent in hell.

Because God is fair, hell won't be the same for everyone. The severity of punishment will vary with the degree of truth known and the nature and number of sins committed. This concept is foreign to most Christians, but is clearly taught in scripture (Matthew 11:20; Luke 20:45-47; Romans 2:3-5). This is no consolation, however, since the 'best' of hell will still be hell-eternal exclusion in the presence of God and the soothing light of His grace."

There are several gospel stories in the Bible that mentions this. First, go to Matthew chapter 11: 20, ***"Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not:"*** Literally, they had not a change of heart when Jesus went to these cities and preached and offered them the way of escape. And he goes on in verse 21, ***"Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, [meaning what Christ did in those towns and cities] had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes."*** These were really bad cities. But Jesus said, "If I had spent this much time with them as I did with you, they would have repented long ago." ***"But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable..."*** So there is a degree of what is tolerable in certain cases and what is not meaning it was a degree of certain types of punishment. ***"But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the Day of Judgment [so judgment is not equal] And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven. . ."*** Capernaum means 'a village of comfort.' They were too busy living in their comfort in the here and now, the dot, the earth, to care anything about eternity. ***"And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: [in their case Hades] for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, [Remember' God destroyed Sodom in the Old Testament] it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom [or inhabitants] in the Day of Judgment, than for thee."*** We see here in scripture different levels of punishment. I am just referring to the unbelievers, but I will get to the different levels for the believers.

Go to Luke, 20:45, ***"Then in the audience of all the people he said unto his disciples, Beware of the scribes which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts; Which devour widows' houses, and for a show make long prayers: [These are religious people He is speaking of] the same shall receive greater damnation."*** A more literal translation would be 'greater execution of judgment.' Once again, a degree of punishment: not everything is equal.

Last, let us go to Romans 2: 3, “*And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart, [or a non-repenting heart] treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds.*” This is the word for ‘works,’ once again it is ‘the employment of the Word.’ It should actually read, “*Who will render to every man according to the employment of the Word.*” Like the author said, this concept is foreign to most Christians. “*This is no consolation, however, since the ‘best’ of hell will still be hell. . .*” even though there will be degrees of punishment and levels of execution.

On this dot earth there are different levels of punishments for crimes, if you are a criminal. Some will get a few months, a few years, or decades, and possibly a lifetime prison sentence or even death depending on your punishment. For a lack of a better comparison, that is what scripture is declaring. That is what the Lord Jesus Christ said about those certain cities when comparing them to other evil cities; that it would be better off for the evil cities there in that period of judgment, than for you. There is a level of execution of judgment, and He will render for the believer that escapes hell and eventually the lake of fire with judgment also according to your employment of the Word in your life first and then to others.

Finally, go to Colossians chapter 3, “*If ye then be risen with Christ, seek [with a passion, with a strong desire] those things which are [ano] above [eternity], where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.*” Set your mind literally on the things of ‘ano’, above, not on things on earth, for you are dead of those things that are part of this earth now. Yes, you have responsibilities here on the dot, but that is not what you live for. You live to prepare yourself and others for what is to come. We need to change our perspective about the here and now and compare them to the things that are yet to come.

To be continued...

Two Perspectives, Continued

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (Matthew 6:19) Who are you laying up these treasures for? For you! Even though others will benefit in the here and now, because you are giving to ministries and churches that are sending God’s Word out to the world; the rightly divided word that brings eternal life by the grace of Jesus Christ. First and foremost, you are the beneficiary, but in addition, it also benefits others. I have mentioned before how many believers will walk up to you in heaven and say, “You know what? I think your participation is part of the reason why I am here. If you did not participate and give, I would never have heard the message of grace and salvation that changed my life. I would have never learned how to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ.”

I have shown the illustration below in past chapters. The dot represents earth, your life span here on earth. Because most individuals are not taught giving correctly, they are storing their treasures here on earth, which they cannot take with them. To use the funeral illustration once again to make my point, when was the last time you saw a hearse towing a U-Haul, or moving van, to a grave with all of someone’s junk in it; what they consider to be their treasures to be buried along with them? My point is, you cannot take it with you.



If you look at the end of that line there is an arrow. The dot represents earth, the line represents eternity, which never ends.

Colossians chapter 3 verse 1 instructs us to keep our minds on those things which are above. ***“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek [with a passion] those things which are above...”*** ‘Above’ in the Greek is *‘ano.’* It does not say ‘seek those things which are on earth’ does it? I am not against God making you rich. If that is what He decides for you, He obviously has purpose for it. Hopefully, you can be trusted with those riches and not forget His work of employing the word of God in the capacity God has called you to participate. That is between you and God. Do not make those riches your passion here, because He has probably made you a conduit to put those riches to good use. ***“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.”*** In this verse, Paul is saying the same thing, ***‘lay your treasures up in heaven,’*** not down here on earth where Moth and rust will destroy them. In heaven they cannot be destroyed, and as Jesus said lay up your treasures for whom; for you. You are the beneficiary of those treasures in heaven, which Colossians 3:1 tells us ***“...sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection [or ‘mind set’] on things above. . .”***; not on this world, the

here and now. That is what we call the dot, the here and now, this planet earth. Or set your mind on the things of eternity, the things above; heaven, where Christ sits at the right hand of God, where your treasures are being accumulated, if you are giving. ***“Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.”***

How many Christians woke up this morning saying, “I am going to set my mind on things that are above” in all spiritual matters, not just giving? I am not accusing anyone or saying anyone is not guilty. Everyone is guilty at one point or another in their lifetime. I am not here to throw stones at you. I am just as guilty as you. I guarantee you, I do not wake up every morning and first thing I think of is things which are of above. I just do not. I am getting better at it, but I am not perfect. I am not completed in any way, fashion, or form. Much of me needs to be worked on still, but that does not change the principle. It does not change what God’s Word says, where our mind and our heart should be.

Matthew 6:19 is where this series started, and the last chapter was about the judgments. For the believer, this has nothing to do with the judgment of whether you get into heaven or not. That needs to take place when Jesus comes back, or you go to meet Him. If you have been saved by the blood, if you are a sinner saved by grace, if you have recognized and acknowledged what Jesus Christ has done for you, and now you are His servant, His soldier, and hopefully a good soldier of Jesus Christ, this judgment has nothing to do about your entrance into heaven. But, as I said before, there are judgments both for the believer and unbeliever when that time comes.

The two judgments I am referring to are the Judgment Seat of Christ and a Great White Throne Judgment. One is for the unbeliever and one is for the believer. For the unbeliever, the judgment is severe. What is the Judgment Seat of Christ for then, if it is not to probably give rewards and bring into remembrance the employment of the Word of God in the capacity that God has called you to participate in?

To quote one author on this subject:

“. . . every time Scripture speaks of heaven it portrays it as a real place inhabited by real people, not by ghosts or pale, neutered milquetoasts floating in the clouds. Second, because we desperately need an antidote to offer vague, dull and notorious unbiblical concepts about heaven that cause us not to long for it but to dread it.”

This is in relationship to giving. Giving is really an investment plan. It is a plan that involves your participation so it is an act of obedience, which I said at the beginning of this chapter. It is a beneficiary for others here on this life on earth, this dot, this here and now. It benefits others that are in the here and now that want to be rescued from this here and now. They want some hope and that hope is in life eternal. We present them Jesus Christ and the verifiable Word of God, and all the truths that it provides to help us grow and mold us into the person that Christ wants us to be; to be useful for Him here and now. After that, He will finish the trip later on when we get over there, and who knows what we will be a part of.

“Because of passive distortions of what heaven is like, it’s common for Christians to not look forward to heaven- or even to dread it. I think there’s only one explanation for how these

appalling viewpoints have gripped so many of God's children: Satan. Demonic deception.

Jesus said of the devil, 'When he lies he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies' (John 8:44). Some of Satan's favorite lies are about heaven. Revelation 13:6 tells us the satanic beast 'opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven.' Our enemy slanders three things: God's person, God's people, and God's place- heaven. Why?

After being forcibly evicted from heaven (Isaiah 14:12-14), the devil is bitter not only toward God, but toward us and the place that's no longer his. (It must be maddening for him to realize we're now entitled to the home he was kicked out of.)"

Put yourself in the devil's shoes, if you can. Imagine living in a beautiful spacious castle. It is your dream home and even though you have access to it, for whatever reason, you know why the devil does not have access to it. It has been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. Satan no longer dwells there, no longer has access there. That has been proven and I have used scripture to prove that. Just imagine you grew up, you lived years and years in this beautiful castle home, your dream home, and for whatever reason you are told you cannot live there anymore. And here comes someone else that you do not think deserves to move into that castle. I do not think you would like the occupant very much. That is what happened to Satan.

"What better way for demons to attack than to whisper lies about the very place God tells us to set our hearts and minds on."

In Colossians 3:2, I began, *"Set your affections [heart and mind] on the things that are above."* Satan does not want you to think that way. He wants you to think about the here and now, the life on this earth, that dot that represents the earth. Not on the things of above, not that line that never ends, which symbolizes eternity.

Satan wants you to think on the here and now, because he knows that if he is successful at keeping your focus on the here and now, you are probably going to miss the opportunity of the things that are above; the things that are part of eternal joy, not eternal death, where Christ is, not where Satan is at.

"Jesus commands us to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven. Yet because we've bought into misconceptions of heaven, failing to look at what scripture tells us, we cling to earth as our home. Naturally, then, we tend to lay up treasures here rather than there. Because we cannot devote our lives to laying up treasures in a heaven we're not looking forward to, it's critical that we take time here to address the question of what heaven is like."

You may think, "Well I'm not that way. I'm looking forward to heaven." Fine, I am that way too. But this still applies to you, because how much are you looking forward to heaven? You think there is this fairness plan that is going to be the mode of operation that applies to everyone once you get to heaven. That is not so. That is why there is a Judgment Seat of Christ. How much of heaven do you want? Are you going to be satisfied to just get there, or are you going to strive for everything that Christ wants you to obtain? The problem is, you have not been taught. If you are

not sure what the rewards are, I am going to get to that. But first, I need you to understand what some of the key points are about those rewards and how they are obtained.

By the time I am done teaching New Testament giving, the way it is laid out in the New Testament, you will understand that that Old Testament giving of tithes and offerings was just the minimum. Do you think God would be pleased with anything less than what the Old Testament saints gave? The New Testament goes beyond that in so many different ways. Those saints had to grasp an understanding that the here and now, the life on this earth, which could be considered the blink of an eye, is just that short. We have a very short time to prepare, to get ready, and to lay-up for yourselves, because Christ said 'yourselves.' Those treasures will meet us at the next rendezvous point, that point being eternity, where really it all starts, without the toil and the sin and everything that happens in this world. You get a fresh start, but this time there is no sin to be tempted with. There is no Satan or any evil being to bring us down; just Christ and His presence.

One of the reasons why I was inspired to start doing this series is because I read a statistic in a source that is pretty reliable, showing the percentage of Christian giving in today's church world. Some put giving at less than 5%, and some put it just a little bit over 5%. And I stopped and I asked myself, "Do they really believe that they are storing their treasures up in heaven?" If that is the case, then why not just give the same percentage of treasures you accumulate down here? I challenge any of you, put it down on paper. From your income, add up your average food expenses, clothing, and housing costs. Add to that 5% for giving. Then, just live on 5% for luxury items, things that are treasures to you. It could be a big screen T.V., a big, nice fancy car, anything. Do you think when you analyze this total, that you are not spending more than 5% of your income on treasures down here? Most of you would rather go back to formula giving right now, because it makes you feel better. Even if you are true tithers, or people that give offerings all the time, you like the formula better, because it puts you in a little box; a little formula check list that you do month in and month out to give. Think about it. I want you to think about it.

In the Old Testament there were multiple tithes and there were plenty of offerings. About the most celebrated time of giving that ever occurred in the Old Testament is when the people were giving to build the temple. They had to tell the people to stop giving, because there was just too much. I want you to see for yourself what I am referring to. I want you to really think about it.

God does not perceive what you think is giving. You may think, "Well I'm going by the formula for tithes and offerings." But you are not. If you really were going to follow the correct formula, you would be giving somewhere around 23% just in the tithes alone. The offerings have to be added to that if you are going to follow the Old Testament Law. However, we are no longer living under the law, and Christ has now put greater criteria on our giving. Christ says '**lay up your treasures**', so you will have to determine for yourself what your treasures are. What do you spend your money on that is considered treasures? Is God going to get an equal amount? Or, for your sake, are you putting up in heaven, in that storage bank, an equal amount of money that you are placing here on treasures of this world? Is it dollar for dollar equal to what you spend on treasures here on earth? This is where many stop listening, because they do not like this formula. If you do not think God sees it that way, then what other way is He going to see it?

'Lay not treasures up here on earth.' I cannot change how scripture reads. Can you? Jesus is

telling us this command, not Joseph Cortes, any other preacher, or anyone else. This is Jesus speaking, ***“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven...”*** If you have a certain amount of money to spend on treasures here on earth, then why not take half those dollars and lay them up in heaven, that is if you are a true follower obedient to Jesus Christ?

I told you this message will have a deep impact on you. I laugh at these fools going around saying there is no New Testament giving. That is right, there is no New Testament giving, **based on the law**. New Testament giving actually goes beyond that. Christ is calling you into account on this subject. Do you think you are going to be pleasing Him by tipping Him \$5, \$10, or 5%? Based on that level of giving, you sure do not want many treasures up in heaven. Why? Because most of you are living here in this life, on this planet, the here and now called earth with no concept of what is still yet to come.

You may wonder why you should lay your treasures up in heaven if you do not even know what is going to happen there. Why should you believe in Jesus? Did you ever see Him? Maybe all you ever did was hear Him being preached, or read about Jesus in the Bible. But, if you have trust and confidence in Him, then why do you not have trust and confidence in what scripture says about heaven? Heaven is real, it is a place. Heaven is not a bunch of clouds getting together with you floating around looking through invisible bodies. It is a place. It is a place where Christ said, ***“Store your treasures up in heaven for yourselves.”*** He wants you to be the beneficiary of all the riches that He will give out at that Judgment Seat of Christ. What a sad day in a way it will be. Yes, you will get in, and you will probably be relieved you got in, but what about the treasures you were to 'lay up' there?

If you want to be legalistic to a formula, then the only formula we have is the Old Testament formula and that is equivalent to 23% in today's economy. But, see what happens if you do this: after paying all your monthly expenses, take half of what is left over and put that half towards heaven and the other half will be yours. Some of you will already be saying, “Well that's tough to do. I cannot see what is holding back my desire to give, but it is sure a strong force.” Satan does not want us to have what is promised in heaven, even if we do not know all that exists there now. We only have a partial glimpse, which I will get to. Satan knows what is ahead for us. Even if we get there, Satan still wants us to miss all the opportunities and benefits that Christ knows we can receive when we employ the Word of God the way He called us to. In most of the cases as a supporter, not as a preacher.

I can feel the tension out there, those thinking they liked it better when I taught on Old Testament giving. You could stay in your box that way. You are not the only one to think that way. Do you think I have not struggled for many years just trying to understand this, trying to verify it in God's Word? Now maybe you will understand that the true attribute or fruit of the spirit, ***agathosune***, is 'generous giving' or 'giving liberally' in Galatians 2:22.

Just as the author I have been sharing with you said: ***“Because we cannot devote our lives in laying up treasures in heaven we are not looking forward to...”*** We do not lay up treasures because we do not want to; we do not recognize the importance of it. You want robot giving that

tells you what to do. I am going to shock some of you now. The world sees New Testament giving as insane giving, but God sees it as hilarious giving. Why is this hilarious giving? Because even though you might put away some money here for investments for your later years on earth, all the investment that you lay up in heaven has dividends and interest that cannot be calculated. In a sense you are a **'hilarious investor.'**

Imagine you have \$1000. If you got a stock tip on a stock that you could buy into for maybe 50 or 60 cents a share, and the company went big almost overnight and now the shares are worth over \$100 each. What a return! What would stop you from being a hilarious investor in that case? How far better an investment when we invest in heaven than any example that I could use. Even the best of givers have really not set themselves free from giving according to the law instead of hilarious giving.

Giving tithes and offerings is not hilarious giving. It is obedient giving. It is the very minimum that has always been expected of anyone that is a follower of God or Christ in the Old and New Testament. Hilarious giving is having the trust and confidence that what you are investing in, ministries and churches down here on earth, will blossom into an investment that is bigger than anything that you could ever imagine here on earth. Can you put a price on a life that gets turned around and saved by grace? No, you cannot. But everything we are giving, as far as our investments in heaven, is the extra benefit above our tithes and offerings.

Again, I challenge you, after you pay your bills next month, and after you give your tithes and offerings, and you have so many dollars left over to do with what you want, slice that in half and give that to your church, and in this church, every dime, every penny received goes into employing the Word of God; getting it to others.

“Because we cannot devote our lives to laying up treasures in a heaven we are not looking forward to, it is critical that we take time here to address the question of what heaven is like. As He was about to leave this world, Jesus said to His disciples, 'There are many rooms in My Father's home and I am going to go prepare a place for you. . . When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with Me where I am'(John 14:2-3). We were made for a person and a place. Jesus is the person. Heaven is the place. And Jesus is the one building that place for us.”

That is not exactly what Jesus said. Scripture says He is going to go there, He is going to prepare a place, but He had to do something before He got there so the way would be accessible to us after His death and resurrection.

Prior to John 14, Peter's denial is predicted and then you get to verse 1 in Chapter 14 where Christ is still talking, ***“Let not your heart be troubled [Literally, 'agitated or something that leads you to bring fear into your life.'] ye believe in God. . .”*** In the Greek, believe is **'pisteuo'**, the so-be-it faith that has trust and confidence in the Lord. So the verse should read, ***“...ye pisteuo in God, pisteuo also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions...”*** Of course you see a lot of prosperity doctrine preached from this 'mansion in the sky' frame of mind, but that is not what it says. **'Dwelling'** is a better translation. ***“In my Father's house are many dwellings: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.”*** Literally, **'I go'** means 'to pursue

the journey on which one has to enter.' In this case the journey that Christ had to enter; the cross, death, and then the resurrection. Without those three things being completed, '*to prepare a place for you*' does not really make much sense, because '*to prepare*' literally in the original language means 'to make the way passable.' So, Christ pursues the journey that He is commissioned to, the journey that He has to enter. For what? To make the way passable for us. To where? To heaven. "*And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.*" Yes, I agree with this author, not the translation he used here in his writings, but the translation that gives us more of a complete understanding of what Christ had to do for us to have access.

Then the author goes on to say:

"A good carpenter envisions what he wants to build. He plans and designs. Then he does his work, carefully and skillfully fashioning it to exact specifications. He takes pride in the work he's done and loves to show it off. And Jesus isn't just any carpenter- we already know he's the Creator of the world and he built everything we see. Heaven is his greatest building project.

For Christians, heaven is our home. Paul said, 'As long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. . . We. . . would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord' (2 Corinthians 5:6-8). Paul said we'd prefer to be in heaven, our true home. Home is the place of acceptance, security, rest, refuge, deep personal relationships and great memories.

God's people, aliens and strangers on earth, spend their lives 'looking forward to a country they can call their own' and 'looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland' (Hebrews 11:14, 16). The capital of this heavenly country will be a 'city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God' (Hebrews 11:10). This city will have all the freshness, vitality and openness of the country with all the vibrancy, interdependence, and relationships of a city. A city without crime, litter, smog, sirens. . . or slums.

Heaven will have an endless supply of fresh water and delicious food. No famine or drought. Christ promised we would eat and drink with Him- along with Abraham and others (Matthew 8:11)."

Where did He promise that? You can find that in Matthew 8. I like to use God's Word as verifiable information on anything I read from an outside source. Does it say that? Of course it does, in Matthew Chapter 8:5. This is where Christ heals the centurion's servant. "*And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith...*" Now what kind of faith? There the word is '*pistis*', not '*pisteuo*.' Why? Because, if you go back in the verse it is the spoken word that this centurion is asking for. He believed that whatever Jesus would speak, he was persuaded that it would come to pass, because it came from his spoken words, from his own lips. "*...Verily I say unto you, I*

*have not found so great a pistis, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast faith, (there it is, the 'so-be-it faith,' the *pisteuo* faith) so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.”* What is unique about these particular verses is that Jesus had just commended the great faith in the Roman centurion.

“He is a Gentile who came seeking healing for his servant. The children of the kingdom in verse 12 in this instance refers to the unrepentant Jews who thought that their ancestry automatically entitled them into the Kingdom of God. In reality, however, these were the false children of the kingdom. Those who come from the east and west in this scripture are Gentiles, who like this centurion, was a Gentile, exercised personal faith in Jesus Christ. The Jews thought they were assured of special favor by God, but the Lord reminded them that they could be last in the Kingdom of God, while those who thought themselves last, such as the publicans and prostitutes, would be first if they exercised faith in Him. Furthermore, the unrepentant Jews would be cast out because of their hypocritical claim that they were the children and followers of Abraham, and Abraham was the father of the faithful, and although these men were physical descendants of him, they were not part of the family of faith. The expression of outer darkness occurs three times in the Bible and is always preceded by the definite article in the Greek. It seems to have designated an area outside of a well illuminated banquet hall where there was darkness.”

In other words, people that live in the darkness, see what others are experiencing in the light, the joyous light. Now what does this have to do with the centurion where I was reading?

“Heaven will have an endless supply of fresh water and delicious food. No famine or drought. Christ promised we would eat and drink with Him- along with Abraham and others (Matthew 8:11). We'll meet and converse with other inhabitants of heaven.”

That means the inhabitants from the east to the west. Not the ones that think they belong there and they have a right to it without faithing in Jesus Christ, but the ones that did faith in Jesus Christ, including the Gentiles.

“As the centurion in this story we will meet and converse with other inhabitants of heaven, not only Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but Moses, David, Ruth, Esther, Mary and Peter. I look forward to conversations with...[and you could put your own list there.] We will enjoy and share with others the treasures we laid up for ourselves in heaven while we lived on earth. God gave Adam and Eve creativity in their unfallen state that was twisted, but remained when they fell. He would surely not give us less creativity in heaven, but more, unmarred by sin, unlimited by mortality. We will compose, write, plan, carve, build, plant, and grow.”

Those are only the things we can relate to here and now, and we think we probably can still participate when we get over there. Only God knows what we can do.

“There will be no church buildings. Christ will be the focus of all. Worship will be unaffected,

without pretense or distraction. We will be lost in our worship, overcome by God's magnificence and the privilege of being His children. In Revelation 5 we are told about a choir of angels numbering ten thousand times ten thousand. That is a hundred million. And then we are told the whole rest of creation adds its voice to these hundred million. The hundred million are merely an ensemble on the stage. Can you imagine the power of the song? Will we learn in heaven? Definitely!

We are told that in the coming ages God will continuously reveal to us the incomparable riches of His grace. [You can find that in the Book of Ephesians.] When we die we will know a lot more than we do now, but we will keep learning about God and His creation throughout eternity. We will remember our lives and relationships on earth. Of course, we will be smarter in heaven, not dumber.

Remembrance is important to God, which is why the Heavenly City has memorials of people and events of earth. It is also why God keeps in heaven a scroll of remembrance, written in God's presence concerning those who fear the Lord and honor His name. The pain of the past will be gone, but memories of being together in the trenches, to walk with Christ, and experience intimate times with family and friends will remain.

We will know our loved ones in heaven certainly. We will know even those we did not know on earth, just as Peter, James and John recognized Moses and Elijah when they joined Jesus, though they could not have known what they looked like.

Heaven will offer much needed rest to the weary. What feels better than putting your head on a pillow after a hard day's work or kicking back to read a good book with a cold drink by your side. The rest renews us. It vitalizes us to become active again. Heaven will offer refreshing activity productive and untoward, like Adam and Eve's work even before sin brought the curse from the ground.

In heaven we are told the servants will serve Him. This means we will be active, because to serve means to work, to expend effort, to do something. Service involves responsibilities, duties, effort, planning and creativity to do work well. We will lead and exercise authority in heaven in making important decisions. We will reign with Christ, not temporarily but forever and ever.

Reigning implies specific responsibilities for those under our leadership. For those under our leadership, rule over the world and even over angels."

Before I finish this chapter, I want to go back about four paragraphs. First, go to Malachi, Chapter 3. What this chapter in Malachi and this author is referring to is giving. The scroll of remembrance is also concerning giving. In this scroll God is remembering what we are doing in response to laying up treasures in heaven and it is being written down, my friend, in the scroll of remembrance.

Here is the paragraph I am referring to:

"We will remember our lives and relationships on earth. Of course, we will be smarter in heaven, not dumber. Remembrance is important to God, which is why the heavenly city has memorials of people and events of earth.

You'll find that in the Book of Revelation, written on walls and gates.

It is also why God keeps in heaven a scroll of remembrance, written in God's presence concerning those who fear the Lord and honor His name."

Well how do you honor His name? Go to Malachi 3:6. ***"For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?"*** [Then God points out their error.] ***"Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings."*** Tithes and offerings is the starting point. Anything less is robbery. This is not talking about the treasures, even though tithes and offerings are included in the treasures. They are not all the treasures. New Testament giving lifts any governor or limit above what Old Testament saints had. Old Testament saints had a lot of governors in spiritual matters. ***"Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye said, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse..."*** Literally, the curse is that they are rendered powerless, and you are rendered powerless. ***"... for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."***

This is where many have said, "HALLELUJAH! God's going to give me so much blessing that there won't be enough room for me to receive it!" And the prosperity doctrine takes hold. But, that is the last thing this scripture says. The above verse is the Kings James Version, and most of you will see in the latter part of that verse the words *'there shall'*, *'be room'*, and *'to receive it'* are all added in by the translators. Those words are not in the original language. This verse should read ***"...prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, until it suffice."*** That is what the Septuagint says, and more accurately, in the Hebrew it says, *'or until it be enough.'* Either translation is more accurate. That translation now goes along with what Jesus said in Matthew 6:20, ***'lay up your treasures in heaven'*** and Jesus continues to say how He will take care of you, comparing that care with the flowers of the fields and the birds in the air in Matthew 6:31-33. The Lord will provide your necessities. It does not say He is going to give you so much that you will not have room to put it all in. It never says that about the here and now.

Verse 11 in Malachi 3 continues, ***"And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightful land, saith the LORD of hosts. Your words have been stout [literally, strong] against me, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee? Ye have said, It is vain to serve God:"*** Literally, vain is 'empty or hopeless.' So they were saying it was empty or hopeless to serve God. But, serving God was also giving and was also part of their service. God was reminding them of what they had not been doing, and their excuse was, "It's hopeless to give to God." The verse continues, ***"...and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance..."*** They were asking, "How is it going to profit us now, and how is it going to profit

us in heaven, when the only thing we can see is the here and now, this life on earth? So why should we invest in heaven? At least we'll get some pleasures from it now, because we're not so sure what's going to happen in the next life." ***"Ye have said, It is hopeless to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully [or 'in black,' literally] before the LORD of hosts? And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered."*** They were comparing their lives to those not serving God saying, "Look at them, they're not doing it, and they're having a good old time. They're living life with all the benefits that they can get here and now. Why shouldn't we do what they're doing?" But the verse continues, ***"Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name."***

Where and when did God hearken, or literally as the Hebrews says, 'pricked up His ears?' Was it when the complainers were giving all their excuses? No! It was in verse 16 where it declares that, ***"...they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, [literally, 'pricked up His ears'] and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name."*** The subject matter here is still giving, and the Lord's ears 'pricked up' for the ones that were concerned with giving through the conversations they were having with each other; not to the excuse makers. The excuse makers were lame in the eyes of the Lord. They had no care about the ordinances, or if they were robbing God or not. They were thieves. The fact is, if your inheritance is being built up on this earth, you are a thief in God's eyes. Prove me differently.

Let us not look at the past regarding what you have stored up. From this day forward, after all your bills, taxes and tithes and offerings are paid, whatever you have left, divide it fifty-fifty. You may still think that it is just too tough. I am not saying you will all arrive at that point any time soon. I know it is tough, but do not tell me what God's Word says and does not say. I have told you from day one, New Testament giving goes beyond tithes and offerings. That is why the New Testament saints gave just about everything they had. Does the Lord want you to give everything you have? NO! He allows you to keep it. But, He wants to see what you keep and how you are going to invest the remainder of it. Are you still interested in investing in heaven, after the obedient way of giving is accomplished, or are you going to apply it all to the treasures here on earth?

This may make some of you hate me. Other teaching may be less demanding of you, even if you thought it was demanding at first. But, God is looking upon your heart, and there is a book of remembrance concerning the things related to giving, which is the context of these scriptures. ***"...and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they [People that lay their treasures up in heaven.] shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; [literally, 'special treasures'] and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, [that has not happened yet] and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not."***

Are we going to be part of that group? Can I verify that in the New Testament? Yes, I can. God

wants us to be in the book of remembrance, because only special treasures make that list. In this case, with tithes and offerings in the Old Testament, because they were still living under the law. Jesus said, "That you should at least have done" (Luke 11:37-42). In other words, tithes and offerings was the minimum in the New Testament, so what is so special about that? It is special because it means you have not forgotten about true giving, the right way of giving to God, and you are placed in the book of remembrance. But the Lord is going to lay a much heavier demand on your life than Old Testament formulas. You do not want the law, but yes you do. Most of you know the formula you can follow, and like I said, do I expect instant results? Some of you will and some of you will not. And the ones that will not, work on it. That is called growth; part of the molding process.

To repeat the example I have already used, if you have \$300 left of expendable income that you spend on treasures of this earth, things that you enjoy to spend it on, not part of necessities. Or even take it this far, you have \$300 left and you plan to save \$100 every month for future retirement, why not give half of it away for your eternal existence? The rewards that you have accumulated there have a far greater importance than anything that you could invest in the here and now. This is a tough. The reason why it is tough is because you define what treasures are, so relieve some of the pressures of doing it God's way you develop a formula, a verified scriptural foundation so you can give less.

As I started this chapter, most church goers give either below 5% or just above 5% to God. We are living in the days of Malachi 3 all over again. "***Ye have robbed God***" of what the obedient minimal amount of giving should be and you care less about the inheritance and the treasures being stored over there. You are more concerned about your inheritance, treasures, and investments here, so when you get old and you cannot work anymore you can live the cozy retirement life. Is there anything wrong with that? No, as long as you do it the right way. God wants you to have the necessities here in life, and for each of us it is different in the here and now.

God wants us to have our focus and our values placed in the right arena, and that focus is not on the here and now, the few short years we have on this earth with our life of 70 or so years. He is looking at the big picture. He wants us to prepare for the big picture. He is the ultimate investment adviser. He has given us information so we can have the best return, not missing out on anything once we get over there.

This subject is not easy to preach, because it draws criticism, accusations, and lies. Those too will come and go anyway. We are all a work in progress in how to be better givers to the Lord. If you think you will ever arrive at being the ultimate giver in the Lord's eyes, that will never happen. Every aspect of our lives is a work in progress. I plan to preach this giving message whether you like it or not. Most of you would be lying to me if you said you did not know the New Testament saints just gave it all away. They didn't have to, but they were so caught up with the right way of giving that was what their response was. Now the Lord is not even asking you to do that. He is asking you to be an obedient giver in tithes and offerings and start putting something away in the treasury.

Do not just focus on the here and now treasury; focus on the hereafter treasury that goes with us

throughout eternity. The Lord does not want us to miss one reward or benefit, but it takes your participation. If you do not give to this ministry, give to a ministry that you want to give it to. Just give; it is for your benefit.

To be continued. . . .

His Precious Jewels

Open your Bibles to the Book of Malachi 3:6 in the Old Testament. I have been here several times before, but I want to revisit these particular passages in this chapter, and add a little bit more that is new.

As I have shared with you, many give to get rich, because those are promises in God's Word that you can claim for yourself. 'Name it and claim it' is what it is called; but that is wrong, the Bible says no such thing. Of course people use Malachi 3:10 as one of the promises where they 'name it and claim it', or give to get rich. I do not care what modern translation or even the King James translation you read, those words are not in the original text.

Malachi 3:6 reads, ***“For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away [Either by departing or rejecting the Lord and His ways.] from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts.”*** The Lord is not just referring to giving here, but about every spiritual aspect of your life. If you return unto God, He lets you start over again. It sets you on your journey again, if you keep trusting and faithing in Him. ***“Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?”*** And God's response comes, ***“Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me...”*** Of course, what follows is their reaction, and you always get this reaction from anyone that does not want to give. ***“But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee?”*** And, God gives them the answer, ***“In tithes and offerings.”***

Although some may believe there is no place in the New Testament that says you are supposed to keep giving tithes and offerings, remember, tithes and offerings are the minimum. Jesus made that clear in the Gospel record when he said 'that you should have done' (Matthew 23:23). That is the basis that is the foundation. Even in the Old Testament a ceiling was put on giving, and there they actually had to stop people from giving. In that example, they were building the temple and the people got so excited to be part of the process. In the New Testament, Jesus removed that ceiling; now there is no limit.

Does this then mean He removed the limit and the minimum that we should give? No; He removed the limit, but He did not lower the bar. Tithes and offerings are still the minimum. What you do beyond that are additional treasures that you store in heaven, which has been the message I have been focusing on in Matthew 6.

Let me make something very clear. Tithes and offerings are the minimum, and if that is what you have been giving, then you have only been doing the minimum. If you want to stay at that level, if you do not want to grow in God's Word, then stay there. Just do not make excuses for it. Deal with it, face it. No one is condemning you to hell, no one is saying that you are not getting into heaven.

To repeat myself, tithes and offerings are the minimum and the ceiling. You may think you are a great giver. No; you are just a requirement giver. I am not demeaning it in any way. You are

going to have to work that out, just like you work out your own salvation; between you and the Lord. I am just telling you what God's Word says. However, we should never be satisfied with staying at the same level throughout our lifetime. We should always try to increase our faith, increase our knowledge in God's Word, and keep climbing the ladder of spiritual knowledge, knowing that we are always going to be growing. And when it comes to giving, we are lucky. Our giving counts as treasures in heaven.

“Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse...” And I told you in the last chapter what the original says, what this curse is: *'you are rendered powerless.'* The Hebrew word is *'Arar.'* So the verse should read, ***“You are rendered powerless for ye have robbed me...”***

A lot preachers know what God's Word says about giving, but they do not have the guts or courage to preach it, because a) their congregations will stop giving, because it makes people feel uncomfortable, and b) the preachers would be out of the social circle of the religious world. No matter what the situation is, giving is to be preached. And if it is not preached, how are the people going to know how to give correctly? Having an excuse in our eyes of not giving to God, because they did not know still does not matter. If they are a professing Christian, are they reading the Bible? These are some scriptures that you do not even need a preacher to understand, if you want to know the truth.

This verse clearly says, ***“...Wherein have we robbed thee?”*** And the Lord answers ***“In tithes and offerings.”*** You are robbing God the minimum standard, period. Then, when you do, ***“Ye are cursed with a curse: (or 'rendered powerless') for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts if I will not open you the windows of heaven...”*** In Matthew, just after the passages about storing your treasures up in heaven, Jesus goes on to say how He takes care of the lilies of the field and the birds of the air. They are taken care of, nourished, and supplied for. They go day in and day out living, producing, continuing in the course of nature that God created them in. Are they not taken care of? ***“...prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing...”*** And here is where some teachers get their prosperity doctrine when this verse states, ***“...if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing [Literally, 'empty out a blessing.']”*** In this verse there are a lot of words in italics, if you read the Kings James Version, because the translators filled a word or words in for you. This translation leads us to believe so many blessings are going to come your way, that you cannot build a big enough location to store them all in. That is the impression this verse gives in just about every translation, but that is not what God's Word says. In the Septuagint ***'that there shall not be room enough to receive it'*** is written as, ***'until it suffice,'*** or until the Lord sees that your needs are met. A more accurate translation from the Hebrew, even though the Septuagint is close is, ***'until it be enough.'*** So to read this verse correctly then, it should say, ***“...if I will not open you the windows of heaven and empty you out a blessing until it be enough.”*** The Lord will determine how much is enough. That is not for you to determine, it is for Him to determine.

If the Lord decides to make you rich, glory to God. Obviously He has a reason why He wants you to become rich. Maybe He just has a different purpose for you. Do not forget that purpose.

Do not think you can become rich and then give less or stop giving. If that is case, you are going to be '**rendered powerless**'; which has a spiritual aspect to it. You might physically go on within the world, but you will be spiritually dead, spiritually powerless. You might fool yourself for a few years down here, but when it is all said and done, when the time of accounting comes and you have to answer to Him, you will not have spiritual standing. That is what it is saying here in Malachi 3:11, "**And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts.**" Here the Lord went as far as to say not only is there going to be repercussions when it is all said and done and you meet your maker, but you are going to experience some hardships here and now if you keep ignoring Me and keep professing that you know My ways. You are lying to yourself and probably others as well.

Verse 12 continues, "**And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, [if you are faithful] saith the LORD of hosts.**" And then in verse 13, "**Your words have been stout against me...**" [Stout, literally means 'strong or offensive'] "**...against me, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee?**" [Or, "What did we say that was so strong and offensive to you Lord?"] "**Ye have said, It is vain [literally, hopeless or empty] to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance [observation], and that we have walked mournfully [or, 'in black'] before the LORD of hosts? And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.**"

Just think of the arrogance, the know-it-all attitudes, and their arguments against thus saith the Word of the Lord, trying to defend their actions. In this case, remember, the context is still money and possessions. These people are saying, "What good is it if I give anything? What good is going to come if I give tithes and offerings? It would be better in my pocket. I know what to do with my money better than the Lord. Why can't we be just like them? They don't give anything, but yet they seem to go on with life. In fact, they've even been delivered in some of their temptations or problems or troubles, so why should we give up our hard earned money and possessions when they don't? It doesn't seem like it's affecting them."

Those are good questions. Why should we give? Well, the Lord just told you why. Because you are going to be '**rendered powerless**' spiritually and most likely physically, *throughout* eternity with that kind of attitude. Not a very good place to be.

But, there was another group. They communicated with each other the ordinances, the observations, of what they should be doing to obey and not rob God. "**Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened...**" I told you this before, '**pricked up His ear.**" God listened closely to what they had to say, and He was happy and pleased about their communication. Still, the context of this verse is giving to God and how it should be done. "**...and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name.**" They were put in the book of remembrance that may be in some way attached to the book of life in the New Testament. Do you think God has His eyes closed to professing Christians that claim to live in His ordinances, yet keep ignoring the right and obedient thing to do? I can show you throughout the Old and New Testament that is not going to be a possibility. Either you are going to be in the book of remembrance, or you are not.

This verse continues on to say, ***“And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels...”*** The ones that did not rob God, the ones that kept His ordinances, the ones that feared the Lord, and were in awe of the Lord, who were always looking for an opportunity to please the Lord; and giving is one way. The ones that do not rob God shall be His. ***“...and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.”***

Also, in this verse, the words ***'make up'*** in the original Hebrew is *'to squeeze by fashioning.'* The Lord is saying, *'I will squeeze by fashioning.'* What is He squeezing? He is squeezing His jewels, His special treasures. For example, diamonds in their natural state, if you have ever seen them, are not what you see in a jewelry store. In their natural state they are not attractive. They are ugly. They are hard and dirty and have a dirty luster about them. They have no finished brilliance. They are not very attractive. Geologists say that a diamond is the hardest stone, and on the scales of hardness, a diamond is the hardest on this planet. This kind of reminds me in comparison to how we are; a bunch of hard heads. But the diamond, the hardest stone, needs a particular kind of stonecutter to bring out the brilliance. Geologists say the reason why diamonds are the hardest jewel or gem or stone, are because they are created in the fire under tremendous pressure underground; under fire and pressure. So the people that are in the book of remembrance, ***“. . . they shall be mine saith the LORD of hosts, in that day I will squeeze by fashioning...”***

The Greek word for this process of squeezing is ***'Thlipsis.'*** Romans 5:3 says, ***“And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulations worketh patience...”*** The Greek for *'tribulations'* is ***'Thlipsis'***; a pressing together. It is like being in a vice as both ends come squeezing in on you and that is how diamonds are made; one of the most precious jewels that everybody seeks to have. Just ask any woman if they want a lesser stone or a diamond. I am willing to bet nine times out of ten, that “diamond” will be the answer.

This is how the Lord sees us; as a precious hard head, unwilling to be cut upon as a stonecutter would do to a diamond to remove its flaws. But, no matter how much we resist, the stonecutter will have His way and He will keep us under that pressure and in the fire, because He wants us eventually to be precious jewels, precious treasures throughout eternity. Diamonds are created in the fire under tremendous pressure. Let us just call it tremendous ***'Thlipsis.'*** If you do not like the pressure and the fire, then you do not want to be a diamond. I am telling you right now, the Lord wants you to turn out to be a diamond. Stop being such a hard headed know-it-all and bow down to the stonecutter and say, “Cut away at me Lord. You know how to make me into a precious jewel.”

A diamond's beauty is molded by the skill of the stonecutter. It does not happen overnight. The stonecutter grinds and cuts and polishes the diamond's surface so, eventually, the diamond will sparkle. That is what catches our eye. The stonecutter, the Lord, being the stonecutter here in scripture, knows when He is finished, and it is not the size of the diamond, but the light that is reflected through it that makes it so valuable. Diamonds that reflect the most light, have received the roughest treatment. Even if you think it is rough treatment to be under the pressure and fire,

you are one of God's jewels, one of God's diamonds that reflects the light that He wants you to reflect. This is also like parenting. Many times it hurts more as parents to discipline your child, than the child receiving the discipline.

The Lord knows what we need. God is more concerned about you as a person, how He can change you, how He can mold you and cut away at you for His purposes. And that purpose is to reflect light, light to Him and light to this world. There are very few Christians today reflecting a lot of light. They are more like that diamond with the dirty luster in the beginning stages of becoming a shiny diamond. They may think that by their traditional habits, what they think a Christian ought to be is reflecting that light. No, it is not. I guarantee you, on the subject of giving; I bet you they give ten percent or less to God.

I could not even believe when I read that the average giving of 'professing' Christians is about three percent. And they are the ones asking, "How did we rob you?" But God said, "You are robbing Me the minimum in tithes and offerings." They are not reflecting any light. If they receive any rough treatment, they complain. They do not want to be under the pressure. The diamond in us is a lifetime process on earth. At least the real diamond, the gem itself, is finished once the stonecutter is done. Our process will not be over until we get over there, so we are a work in progress. The stonecutter is working on us from the day we become a Christian until He takes us home or comes for us in His return. So expect the '*Thlipsis*;' expect the rough treatment. God is not just looking at a short period of your life on earth; He is looking at your life with an eternal perspective, molding you for a lifetime of eternity, which never ends.

In the news some time back was a story about a Tiffany diamond worth about seven million dollars. The unique part of that story was that the original weight of the diamond was about 287 carats. Not a small diamond. You would think bigger is better in this case, right? Wrong. More is not better. You can make as much money as you want in this world, you can be the richest man in this world, more is not better. If you are a professing Christian and you are 'tipping' God with your tithes and offerings at two or three percent, you are a thief. In God's Word, He calls you a 'robber,' because He has a purpose for your giving and how to do it the right way.

That Tiffany diamond was reduced by more than half down to 128 carats. What a waste, right? Those expert stonecutters studied that diamond for a little over one year before they made that first cut, and that is just an earthly stonecutter, dealing with an earthly gem. They knew, in this particular case, about this Tiffany diamond, that the only way this diamond's value could increase was by cutting it down. Kind of like what the Lord does with us. He is cutting away our flaws, making the right kind of cuts to increase our value in His eyes. I am not here to remove your flaws. The preacher behind the pulpit is not here to remove your flaws. If he is successful and preaching God's way, what God's Word says rightly divided, the Word is going to do that. Either you will be convinced by it, or you will not.

Every flaw that a valuable diamond has must be cut out, even the flaws under a microscope. That is what these stonecutters that were cutting away at this Tiffany diamond were doing by analyzing that diamond for over a year under the microscope; cut by cut once they started. That also means that the greatest care by the stonecutter has to be taken so he does not damage the diamond in any way, because once the diamond is damaged, it needs to be cut down even further,

and then it becomes a waste or they have to throw it away completely, depending on the degree of the damage. In this case they took a lot of care and thought. It was an intense process to not only remove away the flaws by cutting it down, but to make sure the right cuts were made to increase its value.

People cannot entirely be compared to diamonds, because our stonecutter, the stone that was rejected, but became the cornerstone, I'm speaking of Jesus now, must take care of our flaws. I already said, I am not here to take care of your flaws. God has to chisel away, He has to cut away. Even though it might be painful, and even though we do not like it, He has to cut and chisel away at our flaws, so that we become the precious jewel, or the precious treasure, referred to in scripture.

If at this point you are saying, "Okay, I get it. I want to be one of those special jewels. What do I do now?" Slow down. Have you counted the cost of the journey and what it will demand from you? Once you start the journey of being a faithful and growing in God's Word, you must participate by giving. You cannot give when you want and give when you do not want. Put God first.

You find too many Christians today that just lose enthusiasm after being saved by grace and test the waters of what the journey might be. And, of course, they make their excuses and reduce the requirements of what true Christianity is all about. Churches have made that very easy to do, because all members have to do is participate in a few extra-curricular activities to think they are a Christian. These people are nothing more than 'firework Christians.' Have you ever seen a firework? You get some pop, you get some flash, some excitement that goes along with it, and then nothing. It comes to a complete state of nothingness. And, many professing Christians that continue in the faith fall into traditional routines and they convince themselves, "If I do this, I do not have to do that." Usually, it is if they do all these extracurricular activities they do not give as much. For the most part I grew up in the church world and I have heard just about everything. I cannot tell you how many times I have heard, "Well, if I participate in this, will this count as giving also?" Just about all my life I have seen Christians just going through the motions. They substitute other things in the place of giving money and possessions. Some have even left this the church all together ever since I started teaching on giving.

Of course, you can give time and talent, but money and possessions are not part of time and talent. I cannot scripturally locate in the Bible where time and talent is necessary in the Christian journey; but I can say that about giving. Throughout God's Book giving has always been a requirement, Old or New Testament. Remember, the New Testament takes the ceiling off of giving. Giving is no longer just tithes and offerings; it goes beyond that. I am not saying that is what you have to do, but God's Word is saying, without question, that Jesus said, "***that ye should have done.***" You cannot give below the standard of tithes and offerings according to God. You just cannot. You can raise the limit of giving according to the New Testament, but you cannot lower it.

Remember the dot which represented the earth, your life here and now? Most people just live for the here and now, not with the perspective that there is an eternity ahead of us, one way or the other. You need to start preparing for that place in eternity, and it starts here and now. That is why

Jesus says 'put your treasures up in heaven.' I have said this before, and I will say it again, you do not see a hearse towing a U-Haul, or a moving truck, with belongings to bury alongside the deceased. Not unless you were an ancient Egyptian. And even then, when thousands of years later their tombs were discovered, all their treasures were still there in the tomb. Their belongings did not go anywhere. You are no better off than those ancient Egyptians that kept storing it up for the here and now. What you really are is a professing, doubting Christian. You have to make sure you are taken care of now, because you do not know for sure if God will do it for you. You are not sure that the Lord Jesus will provide for you, just as He said in Matthew 6, so you put some money in reserve. I am not saying you cannot save for your future on earth, but if that is your primary focus, you have a problem, and your problem is lack of faith. What if you die tomorrow? Which future are you talking about then? The one you did not prepare for and now begins somewhere else, or the future you thought you would have in the here and now?

Let us return to Malachi 3:17, ***“And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of Hosts, in that day when I make up [squeeze by fashioning, the pressing together] my jewels [or special treasures] and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.”*** When you see that word 'serveth' in this context and other areas in God's Word, especially in the Old Testament, the way the Hebrew words are used most of the time in giving refers to 'plowing a field.' ***“...and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that ploweth a field.”*** In other words, a man will take care of his son, because he is doing what the father as asked him to do, 'ploweth a field.'

Christ not only wants us to have a connection with Him, but we also need to make sure that connection is there, because if we detach from the vine, we will be a branch that is malnourished, and we will die spiritually. That connection with Christ needs to be a primary focus. John 15 tells us the secondary focus is to love one another. Unless you are willing to give up your life for someone for the Gospel's sake, there is no better way to share that love for someone else than to bring God's Word, presented to them, rightly divided, which gives everlasting eternal life. There is no greater gift you can give anyone.

“...and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.” When you are in the Lord's will and you are participating and plowing the field, then you will be in that book of remembrance, because of your obedient, faithful response and participation. He is our Father, He will take care of us, and He will make sure that we are not forgotten. We will be placed somewhere in that book of remembrance. Malachi goes on to say in verse 18, ***“Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous [the ones right with God] and the wicked...”*** Remember, the context is still giving here. Here 'the wicked' would be translated as, ***'ones that rob God.'*** In what? In tithes and offerings. If you rob somebody on earth and you are caught, what happens? You may be put in a physical prison that we can relate to in this flesh and blood body. What do you think is going to happen by robbing God? Be sure something far worse than any prison here on earth. Where do you think the Lord is going to place you when you rob Him? You are a thief. A punishment is coming. ***“Then ye shall return, and discern between the right...”*** [The ones right with God and the ones that are wicked by stealing from Him.] ***“...between him that serveth God...”*** [Those that are 'plowing the field' and those that 'ploweth not.']

When you steal from God, you are actually stealing three ways. What do I mean by that? First

and foremost, you are robbing God. Second, you are robbing the opportunity of plowing the field, so others can hear the Word. And last, you are robbing yourselves, because treasures are not being laid up for your benefit. Not only are you stealing from your eternal benefit, but you are stealing from others that could possibly hear the Word of God by your participation in 'plowing the field' with your money and possessions. And again, this is only for the bare minimum of tithes and offerings. If you decide to give above that, your rewards are accumulating beyond anything you could imagine here.

One of the greatest disappointments I have had is to watch members of this ministry stop participating, because they have been tainted and do not know what is real and what is not real. I pray that God sends you to a ministry or church that is living up to His Word by preaching the Word rightly divided. Your responsibility to give is an act of obedience and does not change. Pray that He sends you somewhere where you can carry out that responsibility. And once you give to a ministry, you cannot determine how that tithe and offering is going to be used. I would be careful if you think that, because you are bordering on the possibility of not entering into that book of remembrance. These are tough words, but they are not mine. I am not Jesus Christ. This is what God's Word said needs to happen. Either you are going to choose to give as an act of obedience and love to please Him, because you do know through God's Word that giving does please Him, or you are not.

I know this may make giving not sound very exciting. Other programs may make you feel good and excite you to give. But, you are either a thief or you are not. If you leave out giving, do not even pretend that you are one of those in verse 16 of Malachi that spoke one to another, were in awe of the Lord, and that thought upon His name. It is better to quit now. Do not pretend to be a Christian any longer; live it up here and now, because this is all you have. But, if you are living a life knowing that the here and now is preparing for what is yet to come, then you need to start becoming a giver now and stop robbing God. Do not think you are going to be a 'special jewel.' Do not think you are going to be a diamond in God's eyes, because you are not. You are a thief and you have no interest in pleasing the Lord and you have no interest in *'plowing the field.'*

I am not going to sugar coat, or make easy, this subject for you. If you give to this ministry or any other ministry that is rightly dividing the Word of God, it benefits you. Matthew 6 tells us that when you are giving, you are giving because it pleases the Lord, you are being obedient, and you take His Word as it is; the truth and nothing but the truth. To do any different is calling Him a liar, because God's Word says in Matthew 6:20, ***“But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven...”*** Yes, giving is an act of obedience here and now, there is the bare minimum that has to be given. And yes, it is participating as someone plowing in a field. In other words, the act of giving is not just an act of obedience that pleases God. It pleases Him that you are involved and you know that the giving is also going to 'plow the field,' so someone else can understand that what Jesus Christ has done for you, He can also do for them. They can be saved by grace and start walking down the path that needs to be taken as preparation in the here and now for what is still yet to come in the everlasting.

To be continued. . . .

Judgment of Believers

This chapter is concerning the believer's judgment in heaven. What do I mean by 'judgment in heaven'? I am talking about salvation. Most of Christianity still has this concept that once we get over there, once everything is fulfilled in God's Word, and a new heaven and earth comes, then everything is going to be equal for everyone that enters heaven. You have come to believe that we are going to have socialism in heaven. Heaven is going to be based on Socialism. What is Socialism? A quick definition is: *a system in which the means of production, distribution, and exchange are owned by the community collectively.* Many believe that Jesus is going to be in heaven making sure everyone gets an equal piece of the pie, or in this case, the rewards, once we get there. They want fairness, they want equality. Many people really think, "If I just get into heaven, if I just get there." That is so shortsighted, mostly because of the lack of understanding about what God's Word says on that topic. Just getting into heaven is not what the Lord intended for you, and He does not want you to have that attitude.

Here is what one author I have been sharing with you says on this topic:

"Heaven will be a wonderful place but scripture plainly tells us there is a judgment of believers that will determine for all eternity our positions or roles in heaven. The Bible teaches two eternal judgments, one for unbelievers and one for believers."

That you will read in John 5:26, where Jesus says, ***"For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."*** Yes, there are two judgments, two outcomes. One that will receive the resurrection of life, and others that will receive the resurrection of damnation.

"All true believers will pass the judgment of faith in Christ. All unbelievers will fail the judgment of their faith in Christ at the great white throne, since their names are not written in the Book of Life (Revelation 20:11-15).

But faith is not the only thing judged. Scripture repeatedly states that all men, not just unbelievers, will be judged for their works (Proverbs 24:12; Ecclesiastes 12:14)."

One of the words for 'works' is 'ergon,' which involves the employment of something. In the secular world, it is the employment of wherever you work. In the spiritual world, it is the employment of the Word of God. So, with that in mind, every time the word 'works' or 'deeds' is used, remember, you have to replace that with 'employing the Word of God.' To use 'works' implies you can earn something to buy your way into heaven, but even your money cannot buy your way into heaven. There is a purpose for giving and there are rewards when we get there that will be distributed because of that participation, make sure you understand that.

"The unbeliever's judgment of works [or the employment of the Word of God] comes at the great white throne."

This can be found in the book of Revelation 20:11, ***“And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.”*** The word there once again for 'works' is *'ergon.'* The unbelievers will be judged because of the lack of their employment of the Word of God. Verse 13 continues, ***“And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.”*** Once again, *'ergon,'* the employment of the Word of God, first and foremost with themselves, and then how that Word would change someone else. And, most of you are in a position to participate in ministries and churches that teach the Word of God.

“The believer will not be condemned at the great white throne, but nonetheless he or she still faces a judgment of works [or, employment of the Word of God], at what is. . . called the judgment seat of Christ.”

This is not the great white throne judgment. That comes after. The believers, the ones in Christ, the true Christians, will have another reckoning moment in front of Jesus at the judgment seat of Christ.

“The Lord's evaluation of the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 makes clear that He is watching us, evaluating us. He is keeping score. As an instructor gives grades to his students, Christ gives grades to His churches.

***To Christians, Jesus says, 'I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds [really, 'employment of the Word of God]'* (Revelation 2:23).**

Scripture teaches with unmistakable clarity that all believers in Christ will give an account of their lives to their Lord (Romans 14:10-12). We will be judged by him according to our works [employment of the Word of God] both good and bad (2 Corinthians 5:10).”

To read about this judgment of good and bad works, go to 2 Corinthians 5:9 ***“Wherefore we labour, [or 'endeavor'] that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether...”*** [not *'it be'*, but) ***“...whether good or bad.”***

This is happening at the judgment seat of Christ. Yes, we are going to be judged on our willingness, our desire, and our participation to employ the Word of God; first and foremost, in our own hearts. Also, as the true definition of what 'loving one another' truly means is dying, if need be, to bring them life (John 15:12-13). And, what brings life, thus saith the Word of the Lord, is their understanding of what Jesus has done for them in regaining what Adam lost.

“The result of this [judgment] will be the gain or loss of eternal rewards (1 Corinthians 3:12-15; 2 Corinthians 5:9-10; Romans 14:10-12). God's Word treats this judgment with great sobriety. It does not portray it as a meaningless formality or going through the motions before

we get on to the real business of heavenly bliss. Rather, Scripture presents it as a monumental event in which things of eternal significance are brought to light and things of eternal consequence are put into effect.”

Go to 1 Corinthians 3:11, *“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble...”* Or, as I have shown in the last chapter in the book of Malachi chapter 3, 'precious stones' meant 'precious treasures.' This was in relationship to giving and how God 'pricked His ears' to hear about the ones that were concerned about giving. This verse in 1 Corinthians means people will be laying down the foundation, starting with Jesus Christ, but how they present the Word to you will take a different path; and not all paths lead to everlasting fulfillment and understanding of what God's Word says.

1 Corinthians 3:13 continues, *“Every man's work [employment of the Word of God] shall be made manifest [or evidenced]: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try [test or prove] every man's work [employment of the Word of God] of what sort it is. [Whether it is good or bad.] If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.”* Meaning, if the man's work is built on gold, silver, precious stones, built on the foundation of the rock who is Jesus Christ, he will receive a reward. *“If any man's work [employment of the Word of God] shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.”* So this man will make it into heaven, but he will suffer loss. You might hear some other preacher say, “I don't worry about tithes or giving offerings. That's Old Testament. Give what you can.” But, you are suffering loss, because you are not being told the truth of what God's Word really says.

“Our works [employment of the Word of God] are what we have done with our resources- time, energy, talents, money, possessions. The fire of God's holiness will reveal the quality of these works, the eternal significance of what we've done with our God-given assets and opportunities. The fate of the works [or, employment of the Word of God] will be determined by their nature. If they are made of the right stuff (gold, silver, costly stones), they'll stand and be purified by the fire. But no matter how nice our works [employment of the Word of God] of wood, hay, and straw may look in the display case of this world, they will not withstand the incendiary gaze of God's Son in the next. 'We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad' (2 Corinthians 5:10).

God is for us, not against us (Romans 8:31). He has assured us we won't face the Great White Throne Judgment. He wants to commend us at the judgment seat of Christ. He doesn't want the works [employment of the Word of God] of our lifetime to go up in smoke. He wants us to have eternal rewards and he has given us every resource in Christ to live. . . life that will result in those eternal rewards (2 Peter 1:3).

For those who have served Christ faithfully, the judgment seat will be a time of commendation and celebration. He will reward us for the acts of love that no one else even noticed. Does God really care about works? [Or, our employment of the Word of God] The five hundred-year-old play Everyman is a picture of all people. As Everyman faces Death, he looks among his friends for a companion. Only one friend would accompany him on the journey through death

to final judgment. His name? Good Deeds. [Let us just substitute that with 'Good Employment of the Word of God'] *Some balk at such a picture. Yet it's explicitly biblical: 'Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds [employment of the Word of God] will follow them' (Revelation 14:13)." In Revelation 19:7-8, we're told 'the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given to her to wear. . .'"*

Let us verify that in Revelation 19:7 and 8. *"Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready."* What did the bride do? She had made herself ready. *"And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints."* In the Greek, 'righteousness' is 'the legal right of saints.' If saints that are in Christ make themselves ready for the occasion that is coming for all of us who are in Christ, He cannot say, "No." We have that legal right, according to the Greek, but there is a condition, *"His wife hath made herself ready."*

"We might have expected to be told that Christ makes the bride ready, rather than she herself. We could also have expected that the fine linen would stand for the righteousness of Christ, or perhaps the righteous faith of the saints. But what we are told is that it stands for the righteous acts..."

Here, I am in disagreement with this author. 'Righteous acts' is 'our legal right' in the Greek, because of the employment of the Word of God, first and foremost, with our connection with Him, and our assignment in the Great Commission that instructs us to go make disciples and baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

"If we will indeed be clothed according to our employment of the Word of God for Christ, this verse suggests that some Christians will be scantily clad! [Or they won't have that fine linen, or only a square inch of material.] We have been deceived into thinking that our works [employment of the Word of God] is a dirty word. Not true. God condemns works done to earn salvation, and works done to impress others. But our Lord enthusiastically commend works [employment of the Word of God] done for the right reasons. Immediately after saying our salvation is 'not by works,' Paul adds: 'for we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works [good employment of the Word of God], which God prepared in advance for us to do' (Ephesians 2:8-10)."

Let us just verify that from Ephesians 2:7-10, *"That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith ['pistis,' hearing that leads to persuasion, that leads to the pisteuo level of faith]; and that not of yourselves: [it cannot happen with your own works] it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works [or the good employment of the Word of God], which God hath before ordained [or prepared] that we should walk in them."*

". . . God has a lifetime of good works [or good employment of the Word of God] for each of us to do. Many of these works He intends to do with our money and possessions. He will reward

us according to whether or not we do them. Scripture ties God's reward-giving to his character. 'God is not unjust; he will not forget your work [employment of the Word of God] and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them' (Hebrews 6:10)."

Hebrews 6:10 says, *"For God is not unrighteous to forget your work [your employment of the Word of God] and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister."* Here, anyone is a minister when it comes to giving. You cannot exclude yourself, and there is no better way of helping anyone, than by presenting the Word of God.

"God gives us eternal rewards for doing good works [employment of the Word of God] (Ephesians 6:8; Romans 2:6, 10), persevering under persecution (Luke 6:22-23), showing compassion to the needy (Luke 14:13-14), and treating our enemies kindly (Luke 6:35). He also grants us rewards for generous giving: 'Go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasures in heaven' (Matthew 19:21). We know Christ will say to some (but not all) believers, 'Well done, good and faithful servant!' (Matthew 25:21). Not 'well said,' or 'Well believed,' but 'Well done.' What separates the sheep from the goats is what they did and didn't do with their God-entrusted resources of time, money, and possessions. Peter says, 'If you do these things, [then] you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ' (2 Peter 1:10-11). What a powerful encouragement this is to the saints that sacrifice in this life to prepare for the next! In heaven a great welcoming committee awaits them and a hearty 'Well done!' But this isn't automatic- the conditional 'if, then' makes it clear that if we don't do what Peter prescribed, then we won't receive this rich welcome when we enter heaven. Where we spend eternity, whether heaven or hell, depends on our faith. Our further condition in either place will be determined by our works [employment of the Word of God]."

Does this mean that even if you do not get into heaven you will be judged for not only the lack of believing, but what you could have done if you had believed? Absolutely.

"My God-given resources, including money and possessions, have immense potential. They are levers, positioned on the fulcrum of this life, by which I can move the mountains of eternity. Evangelicals reject [God and] a second chance for unbelievers. We recognize that there's no opportunity to come to Christ after death. But it's equally true that after death there's no second chance for believers. There's no more opportunity for us to walk by faith and serve our Lord in this fallen world."

This is it; this is where we make our mark, which will go with us throughout eternity.

"We can't do life here over again. There's no retaking the course once we've failed it. There's no improving a D to an A. No rescheduling the final exams. Death is the deadline. There's no extension. A basketball game is over at the final buzzer. Shots taken late don't count. When the trumpet heralds Christ's return, our eternal future begins and our present opportunity ends. If we have failed by then to use our money, possessions, time, and energy for eternity, then we have failed- period. 'But we'll be in heaven and that's all that matters.' On the contrary, Paul

spoke of the loss of reward as a great and terrible loss. . . The fact that we're still saved is a clarification, not a consolation- 'if it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through flames' (1st Corinthians 3:15).

Receiving reward from Christ is unspeakable gain with eternal implications. Forfeiting reward is a terrible loss with equally eternal implications. How dare we say that being in heaven is all that matters to us, when so much else matters to God?"

I agree; people who say, "Well, I'll be in heaven, and that is all that matters" are spiritually stupid. If I have offended some, good. You need to be offended. My goal is not to just get us into heaven. I want us to have a long list of rewards when we get there.

"What we do in this life is of eternal importance. You and I will never have another chance to move the hand of God through prayer to heal a hurting soul, share Christ with the one that can be saved from hell, care for the sick, give a cup of water to the thirsty, comfort the dying, invest money to help the helpless . . . further God's kingdom, open our homes..."

And, I am going to add the most important thing to it; employ the Word of God in the capacity that you were called. Most of you are not going to be preachers, most of you are not going to be pastors, but ALL of you need to be somewhere doing something that gets the Word, rightly divided, out to the world.

"What you do with your resources of this life is your autobiography. The book you've written with the pen of faith and the ink of works [employment of the Word of God] will go into eternity unedited, to be seen and read as is by the angels, the redeemed, and God Himself. When we view today in light of the long tomorrow, the little choices become tremendously important. Whether I read my Bible today, pray, go to church, share my faith, and give my money- graciously empowered not by my flesh but by his Spirit- is of eternal consequence, not only for other souls, but mine. At death we put the signature to our life's portrait. The paint dries. The portrait's done. Those who've dabbled in photography understand the 'fixer.' In developing a photograph, the negatives are immersed in different solutions. The developing solution parallels this life. As long as the photograph is in the developer it's subject to change. But once it's dropped into the fixer or 'stop bath' it is permanently fixed. The photograph is done. What you see is what you get. So it will be when we die and enter eternity- the lives we lived on earth will be fixed as is, never to be altered or revised."

That is a hard concept to grasp. What we do now while we are still on this earth matters. If you do nothing, you cannot change over there. It is not how good you were, it is how you participated; employed of the Word of God. I cannot be any clearer than that.

"At the end of the movie Schindler's List, there's a heart-wrenching scene in which Oskar Schindler- who bought from the Nazis the lives of many Jews- looks at his car and his gold pin and regrets that he didn't give more of his money and possessions to save more lives. Schindler had used his opportunity far better than most. But in the end, he longed for a chance to go back and make better choices. This life is our opportunity. Scripture does not teach what most of us seem to assume- that heaven will transform each of us into equal beings with equal

possessions and equal responsibilities and equal capacities. It does not say our previous lives will be of no eternal significance. It says exactly the opposite. Beyond the new heavens and new earth- which themselves are populated and structured according to what has been done in this life- there is no record of change. We might hope that what happens at the judgment seat will be of only temporary concern to the judge, and that all of our disobedience and missed opportunities will make no difference. Will God make all souls equal in heaven and thereby consider as equally valid a life of selfishness and indifference?"

No; the Bible clearly answers; "No."

"If we really believed that what we do with our money and possessions- and everything else- will have an irreversible effect on eternity, wouldn't we live differently? There lies ahead for each of us, at the end of the term, a final examination. It will be administered by a fair yet strict headmaster. How seriously we take this clear teaching of Scripture is demonstrated by how seriously we are preparing for that day."

Faith will get you there in Christ, but that is not where it ends.

"When we took courses in college, we asked questions about the teacher: 'What are his tests like? Does he take attendance? Is he a hard grader? What does he expect in your papers?' If we're to do well in the course, we must know what the instructor expects of us. We must study the course syllabus, God's Word, to find out the answers to these questions. Once we find out, we should be careful to plot our lives accordingly- in the light of the long tomorrow. . . [If you were to] read your own obituary, not as written by an uninformed or biased reporter, but as an on looking angel might write it from heaven's point of view. Look at it carefully. Then use the rest of your life to edit the obituary into what you want it to be. When you leave this world, will you be known as one who accumulated treasures on earth that you couldn't keep? Or will you be recognized as one who invested in treasures in heaven that you couldn't lose? Martin Luther said that on his calendar there were only two days: 'today' and 'that Day.'"

Some of you always like to put things off until tomorrow. You do not know if tomorrow will come or not. He could take you tonight. You need to start preparing for *'that Day'* today. As John the Baptist prepared the way for the Messiah to come, there is not enough Christians preparing the way for Messiah's return, when they will be graded for what they have done the right way, not the man-made traditional works way; employing the Word of God. May we invest our money and possessions today in the light of *'that Day.'*

There are too many people still focusing on today, tomorrow, the day after, the day after that, the week after that, the month after that, the year after that, their retirement, whatever, instead of realizing it is today and *'that Day'* that matters. Today, because you still have a chance to participate correctly, which will be presented in the heavenlies at the judgment seat of Christ, it is your responsibility to find the good Word being presented, not only for your benefit, but for the benefit of others. Are you preparing yourself for *'that day'*? We have to make ourselves ready. That is the commandment. Christ will get us in through His blood. We have to make ourselves ready for everything that He can offer us when we get there, and it is more than any of us could

probably ever imagine.
To be continued. . . .

Discipleship-No Turning Back

Open your Bibles to Matthew 28:16, which is about discipleship. ***“Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshiped him: but some doubted.”*** It is hard to believe that still up to this point some doubted. You are probably saying to yourself, “I would never do that if I was around Jesus that long.” How do you know? What makes you so different? We would like to think that we are different and would respond differently, but how do you know?

Look at Paul, for example, who is rightly admired by many because of his tenacity and commitment to the faith. He was persecuting the church, and it took being knocked off a horse and being blinded by Christ to get his attention. Yet, before that happened, while he was still persecuting Christians, Paul knew of what Christ and His disciples had taught. Paul knew about what Christ had said in Acts 1:6-8 prior to His ascension to Heaven. Christ wanted this hard-headed man to go unto the western nations, establish the early church, teach, and make disciples, and eventually, elders, bishops, and so forth.

So when you read this in Matthew 28:17, ***“And when they saw him, they worshiped him: but some doubted.”*** Keep in mind, these were individuals walking, and talking, and being instructed by Jesus Christ, but they still doubted. So what changed their doubt? The resurrection. And maybe that is why Paul was not converted by hearing the message himself. Maybe he needed the resurrection. Many people that listen to the story of the Gospels, including the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, have not converted. Some even go as far as saying, “I’m a professing Christian,” but they are in no way a disciple of Christ. Most people listening to me are professing Christians, not disciples of Jesus Christ, and they do not even know the difference. And that is the sad part. They think they are a disciple, but they are not. I am not judging anyone. I am just telling you what I see in the everyday Christian world. The more knowledgeable you become in God’s Word, the more you see certain attributes. I am not talking about how much good someone does or a list that they fulfill. I am talking about certain attributes. Jesus challenged those who claimed to be disciples, because their attributes did not match this claim, and Jesus saw right through it. And do you think He is not challenging that today through His Word? You are wrong if you think that.

Verse 18 continues with Christ giving instructions and power to His disciples to go forth; ***“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations...”*** Eventually the Holy Spirit, the comforter, would come and empower them to be able to persuade people through the hearing of the faith to be convinced so they can live the faith. This is the 'so-be-it' faith. But first they had to go forth and teach. In the Greek, 'teach' literally means to 'make disciples,' and teaching comes with the assignment. However, the remainder of verse 19, ***“... baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the son, and of the Holy Ghost,”*** is not in Mark’s Gospel, where this story is also recorded. In addition, it is not found in Luke, John, or even in Acts chapter 1.

Remember, we only have copies of the original, and depending on what kind of copy or translation is used, different opinions can develop. The final decision comes from the verifiable

Word of God, as I always say. It is good to use the languages, but it is possible to line up three Greek Lexicons and each one has a different opinion of what a word or phrase means. In some cases, including the grammatical tense as well. So who is right? When in doubt, seek what the context and the meaning of what is being presented in scripture to see if it is identified somewhere else. Most of the time, if not all the time, you will be able to.

To continue in verse 19, ***“Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all nations,”*** some of the disciples would be called to the ministry as evangelists or other offices in the church. Later in Corinthians, according to Paul, there is no one that does not have an assignment as an out-called one. Even in the book of Ephesians, written by Paul, the disciples are ministering to the ministers in the called offices. No one was without an assignment, period. You may think that all you have to do is show up in church on Sunday or Wednesday, but that is not enough. This chapter is really about the excuses used by those who do not carry out the commission.

The three excuses that Christ addresses are:

Hardships and deprivation
Temporary obligations that get in the way
Being a disciple on our own terms

Matthew 28:19 says, ***“Go ye therefore, and teach [make disciples of] all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”*** And again, I will point out that the end of the verse cannot be verified in scripture. It will not be found in Mark, Luke, John’s Gospel, or even in Acts before Jesus’ ascension. But you find out for the first time here in Matthew, that is part of their commission, their assignment. First of all, I have no problem of baptizing them in the name, but what name. Does it actually say ***“in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost?”*** Does it actually say that? Can you verify that with scripture? No, you cannot. That is a message for another chapter, so to continue with verse 20, ***“Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”*** Obviously, the disciples did not live until the end of the world, so this message carries forth to whoever is responsible to go and make more disciples, to teach what discipleship is all about.

Go to Luke 9:57. These verses contain the three areas where Jesus said He comes first and your excuses are just that, excuses, and your excuses mean nothing to Christ. Luke 9:57 through 62 says, ***“And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”***

All of these men claimed to want to be disciples, but only without hardships and deprivation, only on their own terms, and only if temporary obligations did not get in the way. However,

there is going to be some deprivation, if that is where Christ takes you as a disciple. Or, maybe you will not experience deprivation, but are you ready for it? Do you still want to be a disciple, or do you just want the 'roller coaster experiences' that are always at the high point of the roller coaster? Are you one of those who never want to be down in the valley? Some people think roller coasters are a thrill; I think they are hell. I do not like roller coasters, and have not been on one in years. The last time I was on one I thought I would see Jesus that day. In these verses, Christ is speaking of himself. The One who created all things does not even have a place that He can call home. He does not have a place to even lay down His head and say, "This where I'm putting my head tonight," because He was not sure where He was going to be the next day. We all have to be brought to that decision point about who is first in our life. Is it Christ, or any one of those three excuses that get in your way?

If you really think about it, too many professing Christians do not like the **hardships and deprivation**. They find the excuses, usually blaming others or things they say are **obligations**. They claim they have to take care of these obligations, when the real excuse is they do not want to be a disciple. They do not want to make that commitment. They want to **be a disciple on their own terms**, otherwise when Jesus calls them, when Jesus tugs in their heart, when Jesus tells them to participate through His Word, there is no turning back. There is only from that point forward, with Christ as your master. That is a lost message in Christianity.

Luke 9:62 reads, "...*No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for [service in] the kingdom of God.*" But, you can absolutely get fit. Thank God for His grace. But you need to use His Word to straighten out your perspective and learn what the Lord expects from you. Discipleship does not start on your own terms. It starts on His terms, and stays on His terms throughout the journey of being a disciple of Jesus Christ and making other disciples, if you are called to do so. And we are all called to participate in this matter in some way.

I want to share with you what another author says.

"Eight hundred years before Christ's day the prophet Elijah was led to enlist Elisha as his fellow worker and successor. He found Elisha plowing, went to him, and threw his mantle over him. Elisha immediately understood that this was Elijah's way of calling him to service. So he ran off after Elijah calling, 'Let me kiss my father and mother goodbye, and then I will come with you.'"

There was nothing wrong with that. He was not saying, "Let me go bury my mother and father." His mother and father were not dying. "Let me just say farewell," and Elijah knew exactly what he said, and Elijah answered, "Okay." Putting it in modern terms, he said, "Go do that, I'll wait for you." There was nothing wrong with that, so do not try to compare the stories in Luke, which I just read to you, and this story. If you do, you are not comparing the same kinds of stories. And, of course, Elisha knew what that mantle over his shoulders meant, so he immediately would not be put off either. If you want to read the story for yourself, you can find it in 1st Kings 19.

"He went back to the field, slaughtered his oxen, burned his plowing equipment to cook the meat, gave the food to his family and neighbors, and then set off to be Elijah's attendant.

Some have cited the story as one of which a servant of God put something before God's service saying abide to one's parents. They are contra-set to Jesus' words in Luke 9. No one who puts his hands to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

That is what they are trying to compare it to, putting something before God's service, but they do not know what they are talking about. Remember, he slaughtered the oxen and he burned the plow to cook the meat.

"The contrast seems apt, because one of the persons about whom Jesus spoke these words wanted to go back and attend to family matters, after which he said he intended to follow Jesus. The examination of the two stories shows them to be in perfect accord. The prior matters about which His disciples were concerned were actually delaying tactics or excuses. In 1st Kings 19, the actions of Elisha were a demonstration that the decision he made was irreversible. In Elijah's case (as in the case of those who are true followers of Jesus) there was no turning back. Not only is the one who looks back unfit for the kingdom service, he is not even a citizen of the kingdom. He does not qualify, now or for eternity."

These are tough words, but very truthful. Most people that listen to me, no matter when you listen during the week, are tuning in to see how much time you have left before Jesus comes back. Why? So you can be what? A disciple on your own terms. And then, there are other professing Christians that do not like the hardships and deprivation, so although they are interested in the subject matters that I teach on, they attend church somewhere else, because it eases up the responsibility that Christ puts on them to be part of the Great Commission or any commission. The easier road, the more appealing the ministry.

"Christ's words about starting out as a disciple but then turning back were a response to the excuses raised by would-be disciples, as I said. So it is valuable to look at these excuses from the type of distractions from service that Jesus said are incompatible with following Him. There are three. Each illustrates what Jesus elsewhere calls 'the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things' that choke out the seed of the Word and make the individual spiritually unfruitful."

Here, this author is actually referring to the explanation of the parable of the sower. Mark 4:19 says ***"And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful."*** Here Christ is referring to the seeds that are sown among thorns. About the seed that is sown on good soil He says, ***"...on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred."***

When you become a disciple, you are going to be tempted. You are going to be distracted with the opportunity or desire for wealth, or other things that are related to wealth. And the attainment of those things will become more of a priority in your life and will choke out the seed of the Word. There is no doubt about it. That was so true back in Jesus' day, but even more evident now. This is what the prosperity doctrine wants you to believe, and it is a damnable doctrine from the pit of hell. It chokes out any seed, and the Word of God eventually will die out in you. The life changing spirit that was working in you will stop working in you, molding you, and

changing you to make you a disciple of Jesus Christ. In Luke chapter 9, the first of the three individuals, volunteered to follow Christ. He said, "I will follow you wherever you go. Wherever you go Christ, there I'll be also. You won't be able to separate me from you."

"There are many who have heard of Christ or have heard about Him, often persuasively, but who never got as far as this man got in his offer to follow Jesus. Many hear the Gospel and are indifferent to it. Many are moved by Christ's call but never quite come to the place of starting after Him. Not so with this individual. He had heard Jesus teach, knew who He was, and was impressed by His person and message. He wanted to follow Him. But although he was sincere and was obviously moving in the right direction, he was a prime example of one who had not counted the cost of discipleship. He had not reckoned on the physical hardships and deprivation. So Jesus, who knows the heart, checked him saying, 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head' (v.58). The story does not tell us what happened to this man. But since Jesus wraps up the three incidents by warnings for those who might turn back from following Him, we are right to suppose that this first individual did not pursue discipleship further. He was ready for a kingdom but not a cross. He wanted direction but not at the cost of deprivation.

He was like many would-be disciples today. If a preacher comes promising a solution to life's problems- 'this world and heaven too'- they are ready to sign on with Jesus. But speak of hardships and physical deprivations, and their enthusiasm withers. Such 'followers' do not follow Jesus to the end, and so they are [lost.] We need to put down quite strongly that mere hearing of Jesus and being attracted by Jesus will save no one.

'The mere possessions of religious privileges will save no one's soul. You may have spiritual advantages of every description; you may live in the full sunshine with the riches and opportunities and means of grace; you may enjoy the best of preaching and the choicest of instruction; you may dwell in the midst of light, knowledge, holiness and good company. All this may be, and yet you yourselves will remain unconverted, and at last be lost forever.'

This does not mean that spiritual privileges are not true privileges or that spiritual advantages are not true advantages. The Apostle Paul spoke of Israel's advantages, saying, 'Theirs is the adoption of sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law of the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from then is traced the human ancestry of Christ' (Romans 9:4-5). But the people about whom Paul was writing were not saved, and Paul wrote that he had 'great sorrow and unceasing anguish' in his heart for them (v. 2). Advantages may lead to true discipleship, but they are not themselves discipleship. There must always be a personal following of Jesus Christ to the very end."

And I have told you that many times, and I am going to keep saying it. It is in the early part of John 15, where he says there is the vine and then there is the branch. The branch does not exist outside the vine. Sever the branch, it dies. It is worthless. Keep that branch connected to the vine to be nourished, the vine being Jesus Christ, and it will be fruitful. That is why there is no part-time Christianity when following Jesus Christ. Either your commitment is all in, or it is all out when it comes with your relationship with Him. There is further instruction in John 15, but that is why you need to understand what making disciple's means; to further that instruction of loving one another. Not by a pat on the back or a comforting hug. That is all nice emotionally, but what

does it do to change anyone's life, to follow Christ with the passion, that no matter what happens nothing is going to sever that pursuit? The devil will try really hard as you see in the Parable of the Sower. As soon as any type of seed is laid down, the devil goes immediately to work to destroy any possibility of that seed turning into being a fruitful, obedient servant of Jesus Christ that understands what their mission is as a disciple. Not only our mission to stay connected with Him, but what He wants you to get involved with and to participate in.

“The second individual in Luke 9 did not volunteer to follow Jesus. He was called by Him (v. 59). But he asked for delay, saying, 'But first let me go and bury my father.' Jesus responded, 'Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God' (v.60)”

Have you ever stopped long enough to absorb that verse? This is Christ saying, “. . .***but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.***” I would like to think that if Jesus gave me those personal instructions, I would say, “Okay, where do I start? Where do I begin? Let me go.” And I am sure you would be thinking the same way. But that is not what happened to this individual.

“At first glance it seems harsh of Jesus; indeed, each of these calls is absolute and stringent. But the situation is probably not what it at first sounds like to us. We think of the man's father as having already died and of Jesus forbidding the prospective disciple even to attend the funeral. In light of the Jewish culture of the time, it is unlikely that this was involved. If the man's father had died he would most probably have been at home already mourning. Since he was not, it is probable that his father was merely old and that he was telling Jesus he would follow Him after his father died. and his prior phase of his life was thereby ended. It might be years before his father died but he would stay home for the duration. Jesus would not accept discipleship on those terms, but demanded instead that the man come after Him right then and not delay his obedience to the call.”

Also, there is no conclusion in the parable stating whether the man's father was either old or not. We just assume that, but it could be. Here is an example of temporary obligations that get in the way. The self-made excuses about why you cannot participate when Jesus says in your heart and mind, “Let's go.” Do not let the devil or his agents come in and distract you. Just go. Distractions from the devil are the Lord's problem. Even though the Lord here may look like a bad guy, He's not. This person in verse 59 made Jesus look like the bad guy in this story. Some may think how cruel it was that he could not even go back to his father. But his father was not dying and his father was not dead. He was letting temporary obligations get in the way. Maybe the man was thinking he would come back to Jesus. What he did though was miss an opportunity of a lifetime, and that still happens today. We have no opportunity to speak with Jesus face to face, but He is in you, His Spirit is dwelling in you. Your lack of desire to get involved is going to cause that Spirit to be removed and you will become a professing Christian, not a true disciple of Christ.

“In the case of the first individual we have an example of one who failed to count the cost. In the second case we have one who was not willing to hate father and mother, husband or wife, children, brothers and sisters for Jesus' sake. Again, although the text does not say so specifically, we must assume that this person was unwilling to follow Jesus on His terms and

so perished eternally.

Procrastination is a great enemy of discipleship. The one who procrastinates has heard Jesus' call and has acknowledged the necessity of obeying it, but other obligations press forward in his or her mind and crowd obedience out. The individual does not intend to delay forever. 'Just let me attend to this small thing first,' he pleads, but the delay of an hour becomes a day's delay, a day becomes a week, a week a year and at last a lifetime has passed without any genuine response to Christ's call.

Charles Spurgeon knew many such persons in his days and wrote of them.

You are only young apprentices at present and when your time is out you think it will be clearly enough to attend to matters of the soul's interest. Or you are only a journeyman at present and when you have earned sufficient money to set you up in business, then will be the time to think of God. Or you are little masters and have just begun business. You have a rising family and are struggling hard and this is your pretense for procrastination."

This author is referring to your life, and I emphasize "your," the one that you think you have a hundred percent control of without interference from God or Jesus Christ. You may think when you have things set up and have sufficient money, then you will follow through on your commitment. I have heard that one too many times over the years. I guarantee you, other "temporary" obligations will come into play and more excuses will be produced showing you why you cannot participate. First of all, it goes against everything scripture says, "***much is given, much is required.***" The more you have, the more responsibility you will have with what God gives you. And believe me, so many distractions or temporary obligations will arise that you never even thought of and so will your excuses. Once again, you are fooling yourself. You want discipleship on your own terms. You may think that there are so many other things that have to be taken care of first that God has a kind heart and knows you have to put those things first. If you think that, then you do not know Bible. "***Will a man rob God?***" Do you remember that verse? That verse does not include a condition about too many responsibilities. If you do not give anything to God, He will not overlook that. No matter what level of life you are at and what you have, you are still responsible to participate just as they did in the Old Testament. This includes the New Testament that goes beyond the Old Testament.

"You promised that when you have enough and can quite retire to a snug little villa in the country and your children have grown up, then you will repent of the past and seek God's grace for the future. All these are self-delusions of the grossest kind; for you will do no such thing. What you are today you will probably be tomorrow. And what you are tomorrow you will probably be the next day, unless a miracle happens. That is to say, unless the supernatural grace of God shall make a new man of you- you will be at your last day what you now are: without God, without hope. . . Procrastination is the greatest of Satan's nets; in this he catches more unwary souls than in any other.

The third of these three individuals [in Luke 9], (like the first) also volunteered to follow Jesus. But he wanted to do so on his terms rather than on Jesus' terms. He said, 'I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family' (v.61). On the surface this request is the closest of the three to Elisha's request of Elijah, which Elijah approved. But here the

man's error is self-evident. He called Jesus 'Lord.' That is, he acknowledged Jesus' right of command over himself. Yet he was trying to set the terms of his discipleship. He was calling Jesus, 'Lord, Lord,' but he was not following Him in that capacity. [He was a professing Christian in other words.] This greatly hinders and often eventually destroys many persons' discipleship.

. . . The problem with most so-called Christians today is that they want salvation on their own terms. They say they believe the Bible. They acknowledge Jesus' lordship. But they will not make themselves accountable for how or when they actually obey Him. They want to control that response. If it is convenient they will obey. But if not, they do not want anyone telling them that they are disobedient and therefore not actually following Jesus."

I am not telling you are disobedient, Christ is. He is setting the terms, not me or anyone else. Jesus Christ has set the terms.

"I believe that this is an accurate statement.

In his classic treatment of The Cost of Discipleship Dietrich Bonhoeffer has a careful analysis of Luke 9:57-62, in which he examines each of these excuses. He spends most time on the third since it is most critical. Bonhoeffer thinks the third man's excuse shows two failures. First, it reveals an inadequate break with the past. When Elisha went back to burn his farm equipment and kill his oxen it was to make that break clear and irreversible. He was a true disciple. In this case, it was the opposite. The man was clinging to old relationships and life patterns."

Let me make one correction. The third man was using those things as his excuse. The people and the events surrounding his excuses would not have even had a word in the matter. It is like the phrase, "You are putting words in my mouth." He was putting words in their mouths by using them as an excuse. There is no record of what was expected from him at his home. It might have been true or not. We do not know, and this is where I disagree a little bit with this author.

Was *"the man clinging to old relationships and life patterns?"* No, he was making them his excuse and obviously without their knowledge. The problem is that he did not want to leave his old relationships, buddies, or friends, the life patterns he was accustomed to and comfortable with. Do you think this disciple wanted any hardships and deprivation? He used any obligation that would get in the way as his excuse. And, furthermore, he just could not say, "No, I just can't live with those terms." He defined his own terms of what a disciple should be.

"The first step, which follows the call, cuts the disciple off from his previous existence.

The call to follow at once produces a new situation. To stay in the old situation makes discipleship impossible. Levi must leave the receipt of customs and Peter his nets in order to follow Jesus. The call to follow implies that there is only one way of believing on Jesus Christ, and that is by leaving all and going with the incarnate Son of God."

This does not mean you have to cut off everyone or everything. If those things are first in your life, then you are going to have to put them in the right order. Christ first, and then whatever order you want to place those other things. Christ is always first. Those are tough words, *"Leaving all."* But let me use what scripture says, not just what someone writes. What the

verifiable Word of God says is, “*leaving all that gets in the way, that hinders you, that puts a wall up in your progress, your assignment for Jesus Christ, whatever that is, in the capacity that He calls you in to fulfill.*”

“The second failure is a lack of obedience. Obedience is essential to discipleship; disobedience is utterly opposed to it. Yet many supposed followers think they can pick and choose where God’s commands are concerned, obeying when they wish and disobeying what they wish.”

We could call this “pick and choose Christianity.” You are going to do what you think you want to do and you are going to justify why you are not going to do, what God really wants you to do. You think you know better, actually. God only created the universe, He only created you. What does He know? An arrogant attitude is what you have and you need to change that.

“This is not discipleship. It is not even faith in Jesus as one’s Savior. Again, Bonhoeffer said that if one dismisses the word of God’s command, he will not receive His word of grace. How can you hope to enter into communion with Him when at some point in your life you are running away from Him?”

Why are you running away? Is it because you want to be a disciple on your own terms? You do not want to be told what to do. You do not like being obedient. Someone else has control of your life; and that is Jesus Christ. I am not referring to your past; I am talking about Jesus Christ. The things in your life are just tools and agents that God uses to carry out the commission. Either you are going to want to participate with gladness or you are not, and most of the time you do not, because it demands something from you.

“The man who disobeys cannot believe, for only he who obeys can believe. Your orders are to perform the act of obedience on the spot. Then you will find yourself in the situation where faith becomes possible and where faith exists in the true sense of the word. Disobedience is really looking to something in the world, and if we look back, we are not fit to be Christ’s disciples. Jesus will take no one on those conditions . . . When Jesus said of these individuals, ‘No one who has put his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God,’ He was not just making a statement, of course. He was giving a warning. It is this warning that we must now consider. I turn here to another warning of Christ that must be taken with His words from Luke 9. This warning is found eight chapters farther in Luke’s gospel in the section dealing with Christ’s second coming and the danger of being caught unprepared on that occasion. Jesus says, ‘Remember Lot’s wife!’ (Luke 17:32). This woman, wife of the Old Testament patriarch Lot, the nephew of Abraham, is a classic biblical example of one who did not press on in discipleship but rather looked back and perished. She had been living in Sodom with her husband. She had been visited by angels and had been warned (along with her husband) to flee from Sodom, which was to be destroyed. She left at the angel’s insistence. But on the way to the mountains she looked back in disobedience at the angel’s strict command and was turned into a pillar of salt. Jesus says to ‘remember’ this woman. Remember her advantages [spiritual advantages], her disobedience, and her frightful end. We will never appreciate the force of this warning unless we realize that Lot’s wife was a spiritually privileged individual. . . Lot’s wife also had the advantage of a godly man’s friendship, Abraham, to whom she was related by marriage. Abraham’s faith would have

been no secret to her. His knowledge of the true God would have been communicated to all who were members of his household, which Lot and his wife had been for many years.”

She had advantages. She knew that God was serious. And the same is true for you. It is easy to just read the Gospel records that Jesus Christ is serious today, also. There is no halfhearted discipleship that He is calling for. There is no being a disciple on your own terms. Discipleship is on His terms. What is our spiritual advantage? It is The Bible and the knowledge that can be learned from God’s Word. It is inexhaustible source of knowledge to further our journey and growth in Him. Do not tell me you do not have any spiritual advantages. You have more than even Lot’s wife, yet so many still reject it. Why? It is because they want discipleship on their own terms. And when they cannot have that, they make up the excuses and the obligations that supposedly get in the way. They show up when they want to show up, participate when they want to participate, and then call themselves a Christian disciple of Jesus Christ. Even though you cannot find that in God’s Word, you want to dictate the terms. You want to be where you want to be, do what you want to do, and keep pretending that you are a Christian disciple. Either that, or some do not like the hardships and deprivations that will have to be endured.

If I did alter calls saying, “Come to Jesus now,” I am not too sure many would come. But that is real Christianity, not this incomplete message that is being preached today that requires very little commitment and is all me, me, me. Most churches focus on what Christ can do for you Sunday in and Sunday out, instead of saying, “What else can I do for Christ? What else will He have me do today?”

“She [Lot's wife] would have participated in Abraham’s worship of the true God. She would have seen evidence of God’s power in delivering herself and the others who had been taken captive by . . . kings who had overthrown Sodom on an earlier occasion. Indeed, Lot’s wife had even received the advantage of a special angelic visitation when the angels came to Sodom to warn her family. She was one of the small group of four whom the angels helped escape. In that day not one person in many hundreds of thousands had such spiritual advantages. Yet in spite of her advantages Lot’s wife turned back on the way and was judged for it. What was wrong with Lot’s wife? It is no mystery. First, she was disobedient to God’s word through the angels. When the angels came to Sodom with the announcement that they were about to destroy the city and that Lot and his family would have to leave, the family was reluctant to go. The angels urged them, saying they were unable to destroy the place until they were gone. Lot told his sons-in-law, 'Hurry and get out of this place, because the Lord is about to destroy the city!' The angels said, 'Flee for your lives! Don’t look back, and don’t stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!' (Genesis 19:14,17) Those commands were as urgent and explicit as any found in Scripture. Yet Lot’s wife disobeyed them. She began by delaying, dragging her heels. Delay then erupted into outright disobedience as she disregarded the angels’ command and looked back.”

Just like the professing disciples in Luke 9, the procrastination and delay just led to further excuses, which eventually led to disobedience to Christ’s call. There is no record that they returned to Christ and obeyed His call. The only record we have is the excuses they made about why they could not obey.

“Second, Lot’s wife disbelieved. The angels had said that unless the family fled for their lives, refusing even to look back to Sodom; they would be lost along with those living in the city. But the woman must have reasoned as many reason today: ‘Surely God cannot mean what I have just understood Him to say. God will not really destroy the great city of Sodom. Or if He does, surely He will not destroy me just for turning around to see what is happening.’ But, of course, that is exactly what God did. God said what He was about to do, and He did it, as He said. Lot’s wife perished for failure to believe the Word of God. Third, Lot’s wife loved the world and its pleasures more than she loved God. If you had talked to Lot’s wife before the angels’ visit and had asked her of her faith in God, she would have told you that she was a believing woman. She would have said- perhaps with an air of smug superiority- that she was not like the citizens of Sodom, who had no knowledge of God and were pagans. She worshiped the God of Abraham. She wanted to serve Him. She might even have told you what she was doing in Sodom to witness to the claims of this true God. She would have been one of the ‘better people’ of Sodom. Still her heart was not with God. It was with Sodom and its pleasures. Her true affections were revealed in the crisis of God’s judgment.

[There have been] *thousands who have begun well and run for a season but who turn back- not because they have found the Bible to be untrue or Jesus to fail to keep His word, but because they become infected with a love of this world and so serve it rather than the world’s Master. It is true of the children of religious families. It is true of married people. It is true of many young women and young men. [It is true of clergymen.] They begin well but zeal for Christ grows cold, and at last they fall away . . . those who are contemplating Christ’s service that the mere setting out is not sufficient. There must be perseverance. It is he who ‘stands firm to the end’ who is saved (Matthew 10:22).”*

Matthew 10:22 says, *“And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake: but he that endureth to the end (a better translation is ‘until the goal is reached’) shall be saved.”* Jesus was telling His disciples they had better expect some of the hardships, the deprivations, the persecutions that come along the way. They are going to come, but you have to stand firm and endure until the end.

This is going to be hard to believe, but I had a prayer request from a pastor’s wife. He ministered for almost 40 years, but because he ran into some hardships, he turned. The pastor’s wife was pleading to the Lord and asking for prayer that he would return and not go back, which he was already in the progress of doing, just because he ran into some hardships and deprivation. You want Jesus on your own terms, whether you are a young person, a married person, or even a clergyman. No one is immune to the devil’s tactics, to his *‘methodia,’* or methods, from Ephesians 6. They are the strategies that he uses to get you off track, believing in something that is presented in this world that for some reason or another makes more sense now than God’s Word.

“Regeneration is from above. However, once the work of regeneration has taken place the individual is no longer as he was. He is now Christ’s man or woman. He is one who sees the kingdom and presses with all his might to enter it. What is the character of those who puts their hands to the plow and do not look back? It is the character of those who have an unquestionable thirst for righteousness...”

Not man-made, self-made, filthy rag righteousness, but to be right with God. And how are you going to be right with God? By trusting in Him when you find yourselves in a situation that pushes your faith to the limits, the so-be-it faith. Whether this faith is in your active participation in what God's commissioned you to do, or your personal life.

“...and who will not turn back until the thirst is satisfied. [Until we are at the end of our lives and march on to eternity.] They have hunger for spiritual things. They can never seem to get enough of God's Word. It is their chief delight all the day. They are sheep who are lost, who have now heard their shepherd's voice and are comforted by no other. They were blind, but they have been made to see. Their eyes are filled with the visions of glory yet to come. They are pilgrims whose eyes are on the heavenly city. They are virgins whose lambs are carefully tended and filled to overflowing. They are servants who are using their talents given by their master's to their greatest effect. They do not bury them away. They invest their assets in God's service. They are people...”

They are the people who are not running away from participation or loving one another, meaning providing the Word of God that brings eternal life. They are people who are constantly pursuing with a passion to be connected with Him. They are people pursuing how to be spiritually fruitful.

“They are branches who bear fruit. They are wells that do not run dry. They are runners who do not weary in the race.”

And believe me it can get weary, but the promise in the book of Isaiah is, ***“...they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.”*** You are not weary because your strength is going to be changed and renewed by the strength that God gives you, not something that you produce yourself. When that happens you will say, “Look out marathons! Here I come!” I am speaking of the spiritual and physical marathons in everyday life that you participate in. Look out! We will be running and the race is not going to make us weary.

“They are servants that the Lord finds watching when He returns. Our earthly race is no sprint.”

Some would like to make it a sprint, thinking the sooner it is over, the better. Then they can go back to doing their own thing. That is being a disciple on our own terms, but it does not work that way.

“It is a marathon that begins with our conversion and carries on to the moment of our death or Christ's return. It is the hardest challenge we will ever face, but it is the one we face daily [and gladly], for we face it in the power of Him who has promised to be with us to the end.”

And who has said that we will never perish if we endure unto the end, which is in Matthew 10:22. No one will ever snatch us from His hand. That was a promise given to His disciples as He was preparing them to expect the hardships, the deprivations, the persecutions, and also to expect the excuses that people make; their obligations that get in the way. And the most insulting of all, expect professing disciples to present their own brand of discipleship on their own terms.

The disciples heard a lot of that as they went out into the world. All those things would come in addition to all that they and you could be hated for. For His namesake, by just being a lamp in this world, the light of this world, and letting them see Jesus through you, and if you are a preacher, by proclaiming it. Or, if you are sharing your experience of what Christ has done for you, they realize the commitment is too hard, so they call you a nut. They call you a Jesus nut, a Jesus fanatic or whatever the insult may be. And because they cannot come to terms with what true discipleship is, they will hate you for it ***“...but he that endureth until the goal is reached shall be saved.”***

What type of disciple do you want to be? One that understands the hardships, deprivations, and persecutions that comes with it? Or one that says, “No, not for me,” making up temporary excuses, temporary obligations that get in the way, which leads you to be disobedient and become what you think is a disciple, but it is a disciple on your own terms. Discipleship is on His terms and His terms only.

Discipleship comes with a cost and you should count the cost. But, if you endure to the end, it is worth everything that you could possibly go through, because there is a crown of glory waiting for you and me when we get over there. And, once again, you will hear the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

To be continued. . .

Does a Christian Have To Be a Disciple

This chapter is continuing on the subject of discipleship. To review the last chapter, the three basic areas of temptation you will experience are:

Hardships and deprivation
Temporary obligations that get in the way
Being a disciple on your own terms

Hardships and deprivation. Many professing disciples never actually become active disciples, because when they count the cost they realize what the cost would be and then begin making excuses.

Also, you will see **temporary obligations that get in the way.** Those are obligations that you think you must get done before you can serve Jesus.

And then there are professing disciples who have no problem **being a disciple, as long as they can do it on their own terms.** As the song goes, “I did it my way.” They did it their way, and then put the name Jesus on it. Sorry, that is not the way it works.

To continue sharing with you what one author says:

“I believe the early apostles would be quite amazed to find that the teachings of Christ have been so altered in the century since the church was birthed, that the term Christian and disciple have been divorced from one another. A false mindset has been propagated throughout Christendom. People are told that Christ came to die for their sins and that they need to believe and confess their faith in His atoning work. Yet any mention of committing to a new paradigm where Christ directs the course of one’s life, is omitted or left for a latter time. If the cause of discipleship is ever brought up, it is often presented as optional.”

“Come to Jesus!” they shout. And of course they talk about all the positive things, usually made-up, man-made doctrinal points of view. It is almost a sales pitch they are making. They are 'salesmen for Jesus,' thinking, “Well, at least I’ll get them in.” But there is no half way in following Christ, no separation between Christian and discipleship, and no separation between being a follower of Jesus Christ and discipleship. That is why I preached from Matthew in the last chapter. It says, “Go make disciples.” It does not say, “Go make Christians.” And what is a disciple? A disciple is someone that learns from and follows Jesus Christ. His Word is the source and hopefully someone is communicating the Word rightly divided to you. There is no substitute. If another source is used, then that is another gospel, another Jesus, as I have preached in the Spiritual Warfare series.

“Christ only gave one invitation. He invited men and women to be His disciples by taking up their cross and following Him.”

In the Greek “follow” means a follower “in likeness” and is seen when we deny self and take up

the cross. However, we do not take up the cross with an attitude of “Woe is me, I’m having all these hardships and sufferings.” We take up the cross “in His likeness,” meaning “for the benefit of others.” Christ wants you to be a disciple of His and personally communicate and have faith in Him in your own personal life. He has a job for you to do in the capacity that He has called you to do it in. For most, it is whatever your ministry or church is asking you what to do, and as Paul says in Romans 12:1, with **“reasonable service,”** which is well pleasing unto God, by the way. You are to follow Him in His likeness and deny yourself. It is His way, His will; not our way, not our wants. I have said many times before; everybody is looking for God’s will in their life. It starts where Jesus placed it, by denying yourself and taking up the cross for the benefit of others. Why? Because we are following Him in His likeness, not ours. Not what we develop, what we want to be, but what He wants us to be.

“He presented no second option where a person could confess Him, but remain in a self-directed life.”

If your opinion is not His way, then you are none of His. You can claim you are one of His, but the day will come when Jesus will say, **“I never knew you.”** You might have used His name, but you did it your way. Man has the problem of thinking their ways are better than God’s ways. So did Satan and we know what the end result of that is going to be.

“Indeed, Jesus reproached the people for acting hypocritically by calling Him Lord when they were not living to do His will and pleasure. You find in Luke 6:46, 'Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say?' Jesus does not actually repeat the word translated as 'Lord.' In the Greek language, in which the earlier manuscripts of the New Testament exist, a word is repeated to denote emphasis. Repeating a word was equivalent of putting an exclamation point after it or putting it in bold type. Christ was saying, 'Why do you call me Lord! and do not do what I say?' This question posed by Christ has at no time been more appropriately asked than at present. Multitudes of people have been introduced to Christian belief apart from any emphasis on the need to adopt Christ as a head and ruler of their lives. These same ones accept Jesus as Savior, eagerly embracing His atoning work on the cross of Calvary. A place in their lives, wholly at Christ’s disposal to be lived as he would choose, is omitted.”

Rather than use the word 'adopt' as the author does here, I prefer “make Christ the head and ruler of your life.” As a true Christian or disciple, there is no separation between being a Christian or a disciple. Either you are or you are not. If you are a Christian, you are a disciple. If you are a disciple, you are a Christian. Furthermore, to give your life over to Christ but to choose to omit Him, as this writer says, is really telling Christ that you want to be a disciple, but on your own terms. I have no problem calling Jesus Savior, because I realize where I will be in the end and what I have come to believe and accept as truth.

“One of the plainest Biblical witnesses of Christ called discipleship is found in His last words to His followers before He ascended to heaven. It is in the passage that is referred to as the Great Commission. Matthew 28:18-20, 'And Jesus came up to them saying, all authority has been given to me in heaven and in earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.' The Great Commission spoken by Jesus was not to go and make Christians nor to make confessors.”

That is traditional Christians with a checklist or a doctrine that they can follow, believing you should not make it too tough, because it will not attract very many. A large reason for attracting people to this traditional, established Christianity is that it maintains their reason for being. The religious world may make Christianity seem difficult, but when it comes to the actual practice they only have to show up in church a few times a week. If you follow their rules, then they say, “You're in. Welcome Christian, hallelujah, praise Jesus. You're part of the group.” But the Bible says, **“Go therefore and make disciples,”** not go make Christians or confessors. The commission was to make disciples.

“We need not wrangle over what is implied in the use of the word disciple, for Christ clearly defined what He intended by the use of the word.

Matthew 10:24-25, 'The disciple is not above his teacher nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master.' Jesus reveals that the goal of a disciple is that he becomes like his teacher. He also links the relationship between a disciple and his teacher to that of his servant or slave with his master. There is a very defined authority structure. A slave must obey his master and a slave lives to do the will and pleasure of the one to whom he belongs. Even as slaves existed in the Roman Empire and were bought and became the property of their masters, so too has Christ purchased all those who come to Him for salvation.”

You are purchased. You are bought with a price. You are not your own. You are not a slave, like a slave in the Roman Empire or even here in America during and prior to the Civil War. No, we have a master that deserves our servitude. I guarantee you a lot of the Roman masters did not deserve the servitude of their slaves, but the slaves did not have any choice. They were bought, but their masters did not give them a rescue plan of salvation. We, however, do have that in 1st Corinthians 6:19, ***“What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?”*** You may wonder then how you can be a disciple on your own terms if you are not your own. If you have plans that you think the Lord would approve of, then ask yourself if those plans start with the understanding that you are not your own, you have been purchased, and it cost Him dearly. Verse 20 in the same chapter says, ***“For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify [or praise and honor] God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.”*** You belong to God.

This verse can also be verified in Acts 20:28 ***“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you [the pastors and preachers] overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”***

Also, 2nd Peter chapter 2:1 reads, ***“But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies [meaning a form of religious worship and opinion], even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.”*** You must realize you were bought with a price and you are not your own. We are servants, we are bond slaves of Jesus Christ and God, and there is no other explanation.

“This truth of men being purchased by Christ is proclaimed extensively throughout the New

Testament. Christians are not merely people joining a club, nor are they accolades who embrace a particular form of belief or teaching. The entrance into the kingdom of God is only through the blood of Christ. All who enter through His blood become the property of Christ being bought with an exceedingly high price.”

1st Peter 1:18 confirms this, ***“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things [man-made things and plans], as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition [or doctrines] from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”*** Christ paid the exceedingly high price. Nothing could replace that once you understand what scripture says over and over throughout His Word, Old and New Testament. Nothing could replace that. No traditions, no doctrines, no person outside of the Son of God. That is why Christ has a right to say throughout His Word, “You are mine. You are not your own. I have bought you. You are my property. You are my possession,” Once you understand you are not your own, you probably will stop resisting.

“That all who receive salvation in Christ must become Jesus’ servants is not unjust. Christ has taken men and women who were dead in their sins and He has made them alive. This transfer from death unto life came at the exceptionally high price. Christ accepted death, that He might give life to others. Is it not just that He would require all those who receive His life to surrender their life to be lived as He directs? After all, the life we have in Christ is not our own. Apart from receiving Christ’s life, we would be spiritually dead and separated from the kingdom of God. We would be lost, condemned in our own trespasses and sin. Consider how the church [or out-called ones, not a building] has cheapened this great gift the Son of God has given to mankind. The church wants to be alive in Christ, but they do not want to give their lives to Christ. They want salvation without sacrifice.”

Again, this is referring to being a disciple on your own terms. If sacrifice becomes a part of that calling, then many find temporary obligations getting in the way. Their excuses, prevents them from being a disciple, however they become convinced that maybe at a later time it would be more convenient; when the terms change, when they finally hear a preacher that preaches what they want to hear. Many will not even experience any hardships and deprivations, because the excuses have already gotten in the way.

“They want salvation without sacrifice. The church wants the riches that are found only in Jesus the Messiah, but they do not want to live the same life of devotion to the will and pleasure of the Father that He lived. The vast majority of Christians today wish to remain living the life of their own choosing. A self-focused pursuit of personal fulfillment and pleasure while adding the benefits of Christ to their goodly basket. Christ never offered salvation on these terms.”

What did Christ say about this? What were His terms? In Matthew 16:24 it is recorded, ***“Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man [or anyone] will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. . .”*** You may not like that or have never had that taught to you before, but Christ has found and rescued us in the condition we are in. We need to realize that. And here Christ is not just referring to a physical death. It could be, but it

first starts with defining what 'His way' and what 'your way' is all about, and the two cannot coexist. Verse 26 continues, ***“For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”*** Once you come to the end, when it is all said and done, if you lose your soul, all the gains of this world will be nothing. Those are Jesus’ terms, and it has to be on His terms.

“Jesus has given us many ways to visualize the salvation that He offers to mankind. The grandest similitude found anywhere in scripture is the epic history of Jesus delivering Israel from bondage in Egypt. In this event we see both the atoning work of Christ in the blood of the Passover lamb placed on the doors of the homes of those dwelling in Goshen. We also see the immediate call to follow wherever God would lead (Ex. 12). The events of this first Passover serve as a type and shadow of those things to be fulfilled in Christ.”

Remember, at the Passover meal there were instructions given. You were to gird your loins, you were to put sandals on your feet, you were to put a staff in your hand, and you were to eat in haste. Why? Because all those events are types and shadows that pointed to Christ and how He would fulfill them through Him.

“Colossians 2:16-17 reads, 'Therefore no man is to act as your judge regarding food or drink or in respect of a vessel or new moon or Sabbath day. Things which are a shadow of things to come which belongs to Christ.'

1st Corinthians 5:7, 'For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.' As the Israelites ate that first Passover meal 1,500 years prior to the birth of Christ they were acting out in type the salvation that the Lord would one day provide for all mankind. God would send forth His Son as the Passover lamb to be sacrificed that man might be passed over by death. The Lamb of God was slain that mankind might live. God instructed the Israelites to take a year old male lamb without spot or blemish and to bring it into their homes. The lamb was to dwell with them for four days, and afterward it was to be slain and the blood put on the door post and lintel of the home. The death angel was to visit Egypt that same night. Whenever he saw the blood on the door he would pass over and no one inside would die. In every house where there was no blood, the first born male would die. This aspect of salvation has been embraced by the church today. The church proclaims the death of Christ as a substitution for mankind. The Son of God died that man might live before God. Yet this is not all that occurred in the first Passover. There was much more. The Israelites were instructed to not only place the blood of the Passover lamb in the doorways, they were also commanded to eat the lamb and be ready to travel.”

There are some things you just have to stop and read, and this is one of them. Go to Exodus chapter 12, the Passover chapter. Beginning with verse 8, ***“And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it.”*** All the things they had to do that night symbolized something that Christ would fulfill. ***“Eat not of it raw, nor sodden [or boiled] at all with water, but roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof. And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire. And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD’s Passover.”***

“What do these things symbolize? The unleavened bread and bitter herbs along with the Passover lamb, were all types and shadows of Christ. The unleavened bread represents Christ’s sinless life. The bitter herbs symbolize that the life of Christ was very bitter. He was a man of sorrows and well acquainted with grief. [You can find that in Isaiah 53.] In eating each of these things, the Israelites were acting out annually the coming salvation of God. Not only would Christ’s blood pay the penalty for sin of mankind, but Christ would send forth His Spirit to produce life inside of every man, woman, and child who became a partaker of His salvation. Eating the Passover meal is symbolic of receiving the life of Christ into our body.”

That is why you see in the New Testament the instruction that Jesus gave, then Paul gave later to do this communion in remembrance of Christ. Christ said, “Do this in remembrance of me.” He knew what it meant. He knew what we should understand about what He did for us, what benefit we can get from it, if we remember that and focus on it, and never forget.

“A great error in the church today is in the thinking that Christ suffered so that they will not have to suffer. [Or avoiding hardships and deprivation] That this is a profound error is revealed repeatedly in Christ’s invitation to men and women to ‘take up your cross and follow me.’ Christ had a cross to bear and so too do all who come to Him for salvation.”

You do not take up the cross to earn salvation. That is the aftermath of what is to come. Christ paid the price for our salvation. He did what He had to do, that no other could do, so we could have salvation. But these are things that in the aftermath would be presented to any disciple. Some would lose their life, but some would not. I do not know why the Lord allows those differences. But it has happened and that is His business. Nevertheless, He is in charge.

“As the Israelites ate the bitter herbs, they were giving testimony to this bitter aspect of our union with Christ. As we become partakers of Christ’s life, we also become partakers of His suffering. In 2nd Corinthians 4:7-10, ‘But we have this treasure, the life of Christ, in earthen vessels [our bodies] so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not of ourselves. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, but that the life of Jesus also be manifested in our body.’ Although Paul wrote these words in the context of the experience of those who are apostles, the Bible reveals everywhere that this is a common experience of all who are the members of the Body of Christ. 1st Peter 2:21 says, ‘For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in his steps.’”

But I have good news for you, come to Jesus today and expect hardships and deprivation. Why? Because you took up the cross for the benefit of others so they could receive the precious Word of God.

“The church today is very willing to accept the life of Christ inside them as they are born a second time with the Spirit of God, but they do not want to embrace the sufferings of Christ. However, apart from sharing in Jesus’ suffering, no man can be perfected. It is those experiences that afflict our natural life that are the instruments the Father uses to bring forth

a spiritual creation within. Also, in 1st Peter 5:10, after we suffer for a little while, the God of all grace who called you into his eternal glory in Christ will himself perfect [or literally 'complete'], confirm and strengthen and establish you. We answer to these experiences in suffering in the same way that Jesus did. We yield our lives to be directed by the Holy Spirit. This aspect of salvation is foreshadowed in the Lord's instruction to Moses to command the people to eat the Passover meal, 'with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand.' Those who become partakers of the life of Christ, who are delivered from death into life, are to immediately be ready to depart the old life, and yield themselves to go wherever the Spirit of Christ would lead them, and to do whatever the Lord would ask of them."

I can guarantee you, most of the church world today is not ready to do "whatever the Lord would ask of them." That is why the church world and Christianity are in the state it they are in, with a lot of professing Christians and not enough committed disciples. They are Christian in name only, not disciples. If they are not disciples, do you think they have any interest in going and making disciples in the way and capacity that God has called them to do it? Do not fool yourself. They are not interested.

There is someone that is working with this ministry to try to get the message out, especially the Last Days series, communicating through my son. This person has been sharing what their experience has been in trying to accumulate enough contacts. And of course, I told my son to tell this person, "Do not waste your time in the Christian world, especially with Christian pastors and preachers. Most of them will laugh, mock, and scorn at the message. Let's concentrate on getting it to the individuals." I pray that we will find some pastors that will understand what the truth is about the last days, but they are very few. This ministry is looking for the ones starving for the truth, not the Christian "science fiction" believers. Concentrate on getting the message to those individuals, not to the one that hide behind their pulpits claiming they know the truth because this is what they learned in seminary. In some cases, those pastors know that what they are teaching does not really add up, but they continue repeating what they have been taught nevertheless.

"Mark 8:34 says, 'If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me [in His likeness]. There is a tremendous consistency throughout the entire testimony of the Bible. Both Old and New Testament reveal the two-fold aspect of salvation. Salvation is established through both faith and obedience. Not only must the Christian believe in the Son of God as the Savior, he must also surrender to follow Him as Lord. Luke 2:11 states, 'For today in the city of David has been born to you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.' Although it is common among Christians today to speak of the Son of God as their Lord, there are few who actually embrace Jesus as the Lord of their life. On that day we must all give an account. Jesus will judge all men with impartiality. Those who have surrendered their lives to live to His will and pleasure will be afforded entrance into the kingdom. Those who have lived life after their own direction of their own soul, while paying lip service to the Lordship of Christ will be denied entrance into the kingdom. Not everyone that says 'Lord' is going to be allowed entrance. [Because they do not do the will of the Father. They are a disciple on their own terms.] This aspect of entering into our inheritance in Christ is also very plainly foreshadowed in the history and experience of Israel.

After partaking of the first Passover, the entire nation of Israel departed Egypt. At that time the Lord did a remarkable thing. He gave them the pillar of fire and cloud to always dwell with them and to serve as a guide in their travels. The pillar of fire and cloud stands as a type and shadow of the Holy Spirit whom Christ has sent forth as a guide for all of those who have become partakers of His life. Romans 8:14, 'For all who have been led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God.' Galatians 5:25, 'If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.' Galatians 5:18, But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.'

Immediately after Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, the Spirit of God descended upon Him and remained. At once the Spirit began to lead and direct every action of the Son of God. This immediacy of being led by the Spirit is brought forth in the Lord's command to the children of Israel to eat the Passover meal fully girded and ready to travel. Tragically this aspect of life in Christ is absent in the proclamation of the Gospel today. In Mark 1:10-12, 'Immediately coming out of the water, he saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: And a voice came out of heaven, saying, you are my beloved Son, in you I am well pleased. Immediately the Spirit compelled Him to go out in the desert.' [Just as we are told to be fully girded and ready to travel at the Passover meal.] Tragically this aspect of life in Christ is absent from the proclamation of the Gospel today.

If we were to rewrite the history of Israel according to the experience of a large segment of the church today, we would have them lounging at ease in their homes eating the Passover lamb without the inclusion of the bitter herbs. They would then remain in Goshen [which was in Egypt] continuing to eat from the flesh pots of Egypt and pursuing intercourse in the ways of a fallen world system. The tragic result is that Christians remain in bondage to their old ways and selfish living rather than taking conformity to the image of Christ. The desire of God for all in Christ Jesus the Messiah is that when they become partakers of His life they at once yield all the remaining days to be lived at His discretion and pleasure. We must depart from life in Egypt which stands as a symbol of this world and embrace the new paradigm, where we accept suffering and reproaches that we might be transformed into the same image as the Savior of mankind.

Hebrews 13:12-13, 'Therefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people through his own blood, suffered outside the gate. So let us go out to him outside the camp, bearing his reproach.'

The one thing I want you to understand through these last two chapters is there will be hardships and deprivation somewhere in your journey as a disciple, and there will be different degrees of hardships and deprivations. But, Christ is in control. He is in charge of your life. There will be some that given the opportunity to be a disciple, will make excuses and create temporary obligations that get in the way. And last, there are those who will be a disciple on their own terms, because they do not like the terms that are in the Gospels and come from Jesus' own words.

I want you to understand the invitation of being one of Christ's disciples is still there, but it is not going to be on your own terms. The invitation of Christ has never ever been anything less than

discipleship. The Bible does not say come now to Jesus to be a Christian, but come now to Jesus to be a disciple, a follower of Jesus Christ in His likeness. Remember, there is no separation between Christian and disciple.

“Come, take up your cross and follow me,” but it is going to be on His terms, not yours. Quit making the excuses, those obligations that get in the way. Whatever those obligations are, eliminate them, the quicker the better. Do not procrastinate. Nothing should come in the way of this command and invitation. Then, expect the hardships and deprivation that come because you are a follower of Jesus Christ in His likeness. And in His likeness He stayed connected with the Father so we need to stay connected or not severed from the vine which is Christ. There is no discipleship without being connected to Him. Start being a disciple in the capacity that Christ has called you to.

Come, deny yourself and take up your cross, and follow Jesus Christ. Be a true disciple of Jesus Christ and quit making excuses. Christ is still inviting, but He needs us to do our part to send the invitation out.

To be continued. . . .

1st Peter

Open your Bibles to 1st Peter 5:1.

Verse one begins, ***“The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed.”***

First, I want you to understand that in the church there were 'elders' and there were 'teaching elders.' Here in verse one, Peter is speaking to elders. Eventually he would be speaking to everyone, but in verses one through four, he is speaking to elders. It was a common practice, which, as an example, you can see with Paul and Barnabas in Acts chapter 14:21, ***“And when they [Paul and Barnabas] had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra...Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation [‘Thlipsis’; a squeezing, a pressing together, the pressures of life] enter into the kingdom of God.”*** This verse does not say 'through much good times and parties.' It refers to discipleship, not on your own terms, but on His terms. You cannot choose to avoid hardships and deprivation. Some will have different degrees of hardships and deprivation, but I can almost guarantee you, no matter who you are, if you are a true disciple, something is going to come along your path to put you in those pressure situations, the *'Thlipsis.'* Verse 23 continues, ***“And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.”*** So what Peter was doing was nothing new. It was what the apostles did when they would go to different locations and establish churches or groups of out-called chosen people wanting to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

Returning to 1st Peter 5:1, the word 'exhort' means *'call you by my side,'* and Peter is calling them by his side, as a fellow elder. These elders had responsibilities and Peter was reminding them of what those responsibilities were in his day. For us, the truth and the responsibilities have not changed. Even as more than two thousand years have passed, the responsibilities are the same, which is what an elder is accountable to do and to be as a leader of the out-called ones, the church. And notice here Peter says, ***“The elders which are among you I exhort [I call you to my side], who am also an elder...”*** Peter is saying this as a fellow elder, even though he had apostleship; he walked, he talked, and he saw Christ's sufferings, here Peter is putting himself as a fellow elder and did not claim any special position.

Some churches, for instance, the Catholic Church, elevated Peter to the status of Pope. Peter did not make any claims of special position or anything like what the Catholic Church declares about Peter's intent in establishing the church. He just states here, in this verse, that he is a fellow elder among all the elders.

In verse two Peter explains the duties of the under-shepherd. ***“Feed the flock of God which is among you. . . [Literally, 'as much as is in you,' referring to the ability God has given you to carry out the commission.] . . . taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;”*** These elders are under-shepherds of the flock, under the

Chief Shepherd, and they have certain responsibilities.

One of the questions I was asked not too long ago was, “What are our [pastor's] responsibilities?” This person was in Africa, where they do not go to seminaries and Bible schools. Instead, depending on the denomination joined, you were expected to follow whatever rules expect of a pastor or preacher. Most of the time these rules were not even based on God's Word; so I know it was a sincere question. To get the truth of what an elder's or pastor's responsibilities are, read what Peter said.

1. Feed the sheep.
2. Care and tend for the sheep.
3. Guide the sheep.
4. Protect the sheep from wolves disguised in sheep's clothing.
5. Nurture the sheep.

Those are five principles that you need to take and start applying to your own understanding of what an under-shepherd is. Do not take this lightly. Do this as an overseer, which here in scripture is someone who watches over souls. That is an unbelievable responsibility if you are ever put in that position of privilege. Even 1st Peter 2:25 says, “*For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd [Jesus Christ] and Bishop...*” In the Greek, this is '*episkopos*,' which means the watcher or overseer of your soul, who is under the Chief Shepherd.

There is rank and order in the Christian church, although many Christians do not want to hear that. They are independent know-it-alls that do not want any instruction. I took orders in a church for more than thirty years before I ever decided that it was time to become a pastor. I did not go to some four-year seminary and come out ready to be a pastor or a preacher somewhere. How naive and silly to think that just a school education is going to make you prepared for a pastorate somewhere. Schools and seminaries have not done the church any good. I do not think there is an age in time when there has been so many people on the planet at one time, and yet the church has been so useless in making disciples.

To those who may be thinking about becoming a pastor, under-shepherd, or an overseer, someone who watches over your soul, be careful, because there is further instruction here. Verse two continues by saying to take, “. . . *the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly...*” In my experience, the worst under-shepherds are always the individuals being forced into the task that lies ahead. Forced, not by God, but by man. That is right, and wait for the explanation before you draw a conclusion. You could resist this calling, like I did. You could say to God, “Pick someone else,” like I did, but once you get past the resistance and the Lord keeps calling you within your mind and heart, the answer is, “This is what you are to do.” You have to get past that, not by constraint, but willingly. I see people coming out of seminaries, so enthusiastic and excited to try to find a pastorate somewhere saying, “This is my dream.” But that just demonstrates to me that they do not have any idea what the responsibility is to be a watcher, an overseer, of the flock under the Chief Shepherd. They treat it like a career of some sort. It is not that at all. In fact, among the inner circle of disciples that followed Jesus, there is no record of any of them asking Jesus to ordain or appoint them to go out to world after His death and

resurrection. Actually, scripture says about half of the inner circle of disciples went back to their previous professions, and Jesus had to go find them, including Peter, and tell them, their destiny was headed in a different direction. Like I said, the worst under-shepherds are always the individuals being forced by man into the task that lies ahead, but God's calling is true.

There are days that I do not wish to be anywhere else. Let me tell you, and I am being truthful, I realize the privilege. I love talking about Jesus and I love preaching about Jesus, but there are days I just do not feel like being here. Mostly because of the physical aspect of being an under-shepherd. So, to correct this, I fix my focus and I realize what an honor, privilege, and responsibility this is. My attitude has to be one of willingness, because, first, I recognize what He has done for me, and second, I know what He expects from me and how it is going to benefit others. I tell myself, "Get busy. Get out there" and I do not treat this like a nine to five job. I do not treat it like a job I hate to do or hate to be in, because I have no choice or it puts bread on my table.

This not a job, even though the church world has established it as a career. Paul had a career making tents, and there is no record that he ever stopped doing that. What do you think his love was after being knocked down, blinded, given sight, and then instructed by the Lord, "Now go"? The Lord did not make it easy for him. Paul was hated in many different towns. He barely escaped some towns after preaching. He was beaten, bruised, whipped, among other things, and he still had to go out there and earn a living as a tent maker. Paul, in addition, also says that congregations better realize under-shepherds are worth double honor. They should be treated as so, because that was the principle, not just in the New Testament, but all the way back to the Old Testament, and not because someone told you this is what you have to do, but because you love to do it. Because, first of all, you are being obedient to the command that is laid before you. And second, because you too are part of the Great Commission in the capacity the Lord has put you. You are all part of that Commission; what others are seeing, what others are hearing, what others are turning away from. That is, their dull path of pretending to be a Christian without any understanding of what a Christian is, into a true disciple of Jesus Christ. We are making disciples, not failures, for the Lord Jesus.

As verse two continues we read, ***"...not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre..."*** Often the question comes up, "How do you know you are under-shepherding for the right reason?" Well, is your motive for serving in that elder position for prosperity? All you have to do is look at today's Christian world and see that potential. What a career. Someone could pretend to do the Lord's work and get rich at the same time. The Lord just may decide to make you rich, but if your motive is to become rich because of the benefits that come with it, then you have got a problem. You are doing it for ***'filthy lucre,'*** because you are looking at the potential of prosperity that might come with the position, rather than God's purposes.

Likewise, verse three continues the warning, ***"Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples [examples] to the flock."*** I have heard pastors say, "I'm no example for the flock." So when did you get to choose and decide you are not going to be an example to the flock? When did you choose to be exempt from scripture's instruction? There are a lot of times that I am not a very good example. I will be the first one to admit it, but that does not change what the instruction is, what the instruction declares that elders are to be. Truth is truth that

comes from scripture. Everything else is philosophizing what you are or what you are not. I know what I am not, and that does not change one aspect of what we are to be as elders, teachers, pastors, bishops, or whatever you want to call yourself in today's terminology. You are to be an example. Just think about it; parents are examples to their children. You are a good example or a bad example.

Try to be a good example, is what Peter is saying here, and be an example to the flock, not a lord. I am not your lord and neither is any pastor or preacher out there. You do not belong to me. How presumptuous for anyone to think that. You belong to the Lord. That is what the church is all about; out-called ones that belong to Him. Elders are just overseers, under-shepherds, to the Chief Shepherd. I am to serve as an example, not as a dictator. This verse also shows under-shepherds, or elders, in Peter's day had significant authority in the early church. Why? Because authority came to these positions and Peter had to make sure that they did not abuse those positions. If it was a powerless position, Peter would not have had to give these warnings to the elders, but the potential was there for 'lording,' which came with the position, if you allowed it to happen in. The fact is, you are not mine, you are Jesus Christ's. The fact is, pastors are to be examples to the flock, whether they believe it or not, whether they like it or not, and you can see that, if you are honest with yourself.

Verse four in 1st Peter continues, ***“And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.”*** Meaning, if you follow the instruction, and are a good steward in the position that God has given you under the Chief Shepherd, the end result is a crown of glory that fades not away. In the Greek, ***'fadeth not away'*** is referring to a 'fable flower,' which is the crown of leaves the victorious Olympian received. This crown of leaves also had flowers in it and the crown represented the fame that would not fade away. In reality, however, those leaves and flowers would fade away, but a good under-shepherd under the Chief Shepherd, that takes this instruction seriously and applies it, will find themselves in a position someday where the Lord is going to say, “Well done good and faithful servant,” and you will receive a crown of glory that will never fade away. But before the crown is placed, the under-shepherd needs to understand their job is to feed and lead the sheep. The sheep do not lead the under-shepherd. A pastor should not take a survey of their congregation to find out what they would like to hear preached or what kind of activities they would like to do. The under-shepherd is responsible for the activities, including what is taught. He works for the Chief Shepherd, he answers to Him. If you do not like what he is doing or saying, the only option you have is to leave. The Bible never says that you are to change the under-shepherd. If you feel that way, you should leave and find an under-shepherd that you can follow. But, I have good news for both the under-shepherds and the faithful congregations, you are promised a crown of glory.

When reading verse five, ***“Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble,”*** the words *submit* and *subject* are the same word in the Greek, even though the King James translators used two different English words. The Greek word is a military term that literally means *'to rank under or to arrange.'* So this verse should read, ***“Yea, all be arranged under rank one to another...”*** In other words, find your place or pastor who is leading to tell you what your place is in the congregation. I am not talking about the individual's standing with Christ, but your place in the church, the out-called ones, the true church.

Coincidentally, I have had people tell me they need something to do, a task for this church, but they will not even call or email me once a week as I have requested. They cannot even submit or subject themselves to that request, and they are not fooling anyone. There are a lot of people who think they should not take instruction from anyone. That is why pastors bow down to congregations and do their will, because they do not have the stomach to keep going against the congregations will. You might think you know what is better for you, but while you are in this church, hopefully through the Spirit of the Lord, I can get my instruction from Him, in the general sense, of what the congregation needs. You work your own specific individual needs out with Him, through His Word, and if I give you some insight on how to do that as an individual, then we both win in that situation.

To continue, after submitting and subjecting yourself in the arrangement of rank in the church to one another, verse five further says to “*...be clothed with humility...*” How is humility manifested here? This humility is demonstrated by submission, even for those who do not want to submit or subject themselves to anything. I have had people come and go in this ministry. They like what they hear, they like what I preach, but if I thought they needed correction, they leave. They have no humility, subjection, or ability to submit in them. They do not want to follow any type of arrangement of rank in the church. They are just, 'hippies for Jesus,' without humility and God says, “He resisted the proud.” With this attitude, you are not coming against me; you are coming against the Lord Himself, because you are refusing to put yourself under rank in the order of the church world. This modern generation, this last generation, has put the church into such disorder, they are believing Satan’s lies and deception.

In addition, if humility is demonstrated by submission, what does that mean? It means you are putting away your own agenda, being a disciple on your own terms, even if the Lord’s agenda is expressed through another person, or the elder, in the context of these verses. Do you know why so many Pastors bow down to their congregations? Because we have young fools coming out of seminaries thinking they know everything about how to run a church, and they went to the wrong place to learn how to run a church under God’s order. The church is not a democracy. This is not the church of 'You.' This is the Lord’s church and He has given us instruction on how elders should run it.

In verse five, the phrase “*...be clothed with...*” uses a rare word that refers to a slave putting on an apron before serving someone, as Jesus did before washing the disciples’ feet. You would think that if it was good enough for Jesus, it would be good enough for you. But no, many believe they are above that. They do not follow any rank and order. They are an independent planet of their own, with their own gravitational pull and do not even need the sun, or in this case, the Son of God, to bring order into their life. And they have justified it by taking all kinds of scriptures out of context to appease themselves. The sad part about it is there are pastors that allow this to happen without any forewarning to elders or to the congregation. It is not possible to fall for Satan's deceptions and still follow how the Lord wanted the church to be organized and run. But, what happens if they do follow the Lord's ways? It says in the latter part of that verse “*...for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*” You have to lay aside your pride, but grace and pride are eternal enemies. Pride demands that the Lord blesses us in the light of what I think I deserve saying, “After all, am I not worth it, Lord?” Pride is one of the ugliest

sins and it usually gets hidden by all kinds of names such as, independence and self-reliance.

As we read on in verse six and seven, ***“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you,”*** here true humility is defined by our ability to cast our cares upon the Lord. That is right. Most of you think you know how to run your affairs better than the Lord, especially when it comes to cares, anxieties, and worries. Do you call out worries and cares for what they are? I know I have to ask that question of myself all the time. And now I am getting to the meaning of verse seven in the light of what was written here by Peter. Mainly, how does this verse apply, when should it be applied, and what is the condition before the application of it? Do you call out worries and cares for what they are, which is, if you are honest with yourself, pride and unbelief? Before you are going to cast all your cares upon Christ when He careth for you, He wants you to humble yourself.

Before I explain 'humbling yourself,' let us read verse seven. ***“Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.”*** Now, the Greek word for 'casting' literally means *'to throw upon or to place upon'* and there are only two places in scripture where it is used, 1st Peter and Luke 19:35. In Luke 19:30, two disciples were told to go find a colt, and verse 33 continues, ***“And as they were losing the colt, the owners thereof said unto them, Why loose ye the colt? And they said, The Lord hath need of him.”*** Then we get to verse 35, ***“And they brought him to Jesus: and they cast their garments upon the colt, and they set Jesus thereon.”*** In both 1st Peter and here in Luke 19:35 casting means *'to throw upon.'*

Now, regarding your cares and worries, who are we going to cast them upon? Your neighbor, your wife? Sure, they share in that concern, but you should be casting off those concerns and those cares onto who; Jesus Christ. Just as 1st Peter 5:6 states, ***“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.”*** See, the Lord does want to exalt you, but He has to bring you to a point where you humbly understand not only the order of the church, but in the order how you deal with Him. I have seen so many times people saying, “Lord I’m casting all my cares upon you, for you care for me.” But they do not give Jesus the entire problem. Maybe part requires a little more maneuvering, so they keep part of the problem in their possession, because God’s timing is not what they think it should be, or maybe they will not necessarily get the answer they want. In other words, you only cast so much on the Lord, but a true humble heart will say, “Lord here you go, it’s all yours.” If you resist that wonderful opportunity, more than likely it is because of your pride, because you want to be independent and self-reliant. Furthermore, if you do not cast your cares upon the Lord you are saying to Him, that you can deal with your problems better than He can. Discipleship on your own terms is not discipleship. You are living a lie and you have been deceived by the master deceiver, Satan and his minions.

Verse eight tells us to, ***“Be sober. . .”*** or free from intoxicants, whether spiritual or physical. For instance, you can be intoxicated by stupidity. You can be deceived that you have become rich, because you have been intoxicated with the false doctrine that Jesus was just waiting for you to say, “Make me rich.” In a sense, that is what the prosperity doctrine is. You can be intoxicated in the spiritual sense believing a lie, believing something is coming from God’s Word, because of the way some master the false doctrine to deliver a message that is not true, but you believe it is

true. Or in the physical sense, anything that has control over your mind that does not allow the Lord to take control.

“Be sober, be vigilant; [or watchful] because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:” Satan is a lion, as an example here in scripture, who may roar with his bad breath. But let me tell you, he was 'defanged' at the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yet the sounds of his roars, which are nothing more than lies and deception, still affect Christians today. And what happens is they start running for cover with self-preserving attitudes. They take the garment away from the colt in Luke 19:35. They are telling the Lord, “Your way didn’t work. Here, put the problem back on my shoulders and let me try to figure this out. Your method didn’t work out Lord, I got it from here. Take a break.” While at the same time, they are running away from the problem, because the devil is on their heels, they can feel his bad breath on their neck, and he is about to devour them. But you cannot have it both ways. It is one way or the other. Yes, the devil will seem like a roaring lion and he will have victory over you, because you have so much pride and control about how you think the problem should be solved. You snatch it right from the Lord’s hand, what He has as an answer, as a solution, or as a path. What I am trying to tell you is stop running for cover, with a self-preserving attitude, which only demonstrates your pride and lack of humility. Satan is going to devour the prideful first.

“Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.” In other words, other Christians are going through the same things you are. This is nothing new. The Lord has heard and seen it all before. So how do you resist Satan? How do you put him in his place, letting him know that he is 'defanged' because of what Christ did for us? Cast your cares upon the Lord. Let go of pride, get humility to let go of whatever your problems are, be it financial hardships, afflictions, and sickness. It is not to say that you are just going to sit there like a bump on a log and do nothing. If you are having financial problems and you do not have a job, get one. But, in the meantime, you are casting that request, that situation, all on Jesus, and I am telling you, see if He does not direct your path tonight, tomorrow, next week, next month. He wants to do this for you, but for too many Christians it is like a tug of war. You do not want to let go of the garment the disciples cast or threw upon the colt. Some of you will cast or throw the garment on the colt, but you also want to hang on to just a little piece of it. You just cannot let go, because deep down inside of you, you think you have a better answer. You can find the answer on your own. How good has that been working for you at solving your problems? Where has it gotten you in your spiritual life? I am willing to bet, if most of you are honest, it has not gotten you very far. Let go now, cast it upon Him. Do not let Satan have the upper edge as the adversary, as a roaring lion, seeking how he can devour you up.

Verse nine says, ***“Whom resist steadfast in the faith...”*** Their faith is 'the hearing of faith.' It is ***'pistis'*** once again. When 'faith' is combined with 'resist', which comes from two Greek words ***'stand'*** and ***against,*** it means you can stand and come against, if you keep hearing and hearing the Word of God, which in turn increases and builds your faith, because you have become persuaded by it. I do not care how much you think you know, stop studying, stop listening, and see what happens in your life. Do you think you will be full of faith? What Peter is doing here is sending us reminders, not just for his day, but for us also, for pastors and congregations.

Peter comes to the conclusion of this particular subject by saying that you need to stand up and be against Satan's ways, which would have you be proud and show God that you have no humility; that you are not humble enough to let Him have whatever care or worry you have. By not letting go of those, you are just demonstrating your pride, your lack of humility, because you are being too independent and self-reliant. And Christ knows that unless you are relying upon Him, you stand little chance. You just become a victim of the adversary. Satan will eat you up and spit you out as a lion would. You have to stand and come against the temptations to do it your way, and come against the prideful attitudes that develop reliance on yourself. You need to learn to cast your cares upon Him and then, let it go. Let Him handle it. It is not that easy, I will be the first one to tell you. I have to remind myself at least once a week to cast my care upon Him, because He careth for me. Who better can care and understand what my needs and this churches needs are? The same is true for you.

That is why you need to keep on hearing, and hearing, and hearing the Word of God. All that hearing will persuade and remind you of what the truth of God's Word says, and develops a stronger faith in you, which moves you into the so-be-it faith. God said it, "It is done." And you need to say, "Here are my cares Lord, they are yours now. I'm not claiming any possession on how it should be handled any longer. I don't want to be a disciple on my own terms. I want to be a disciple on yours." Then, with that, you can even state what verse ten states, "***But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect*** [or bring you to a more completed state] **stablish. . .**" Literally, to make you strong and bring you to a settled place, where He wants you in the relationship you have with Him. "***To him be glory, and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.***"

To repeat, you need to call out your worries and cares for what they are; and that is pride and unbelief. You need to say that you have a change of path, if necessary, in how you have been operating. Forget about the elder part, that was for elders, but for you personally, as an individual in the congregation, whether it is this or another congregation. Pride and unbelief always desires to usurp the Lord's place as our providing care master, but He has given us the choice whether He is going to be that for us or not. We have to let go, and the biggest problem for any Christian is to let go and release our cares from our possession and control. Try it, I challenge you, and God's Word challenges you. Try doing it God's way. I have had to learn, and I am still learning this lesson over and over and over every time I have failed. When I do it His way, it is so evident. It shows not only me, but even others around me, that once I cast the cares upon Him, it always comes out right. The Lord does not make mistakes, humans do. Self-reliant, independent humans that want to do everything on their own terms are prone to it and Satan will be there to devour you up, if you let him.

Put your cares and worries in their proper place. If you do not, it is just another example of how your pride, lack of humility, and unbelief is front and center. It is not so important that I see or your neighbor sees this, as it is that the Lord is seeing this. Every time you do not cast that care upon Him and you still want to hold onto it, what you are doing is rejecting His invitation, and that is not a good place to find yourself in. Take it from someone that knows. He will make it even more uncomfortable for you if you keep rejecting that invitation. He wants your cares, He wants your worries, and He wants your whole life. Just as you submit your life as a disciple of

Jesus Christ to Him, He is telling you that you have an avenue for your worries and cares also. Why would you not want Him to take over? We know seeing is believing, but that is where faith comes in, and that is why you need to keep hearing and hearing and hearing; so you can constantly keep being persuaded that what this word is saying is true, and if you get to that point, see if it is not true.

I dare you, give it a try. But if you put your cares on the Lord, you need to release them completely. Do not hang on to them. Let the Lord go to work for you in the following days, weeks, and years ahead; whatever remains before His return. He careth for you like no man could ever care for you. He sent His only Begotten Son to die for you. What are your cares compared to that? Think about it. If He is willing to give His Son, you think He is not willing to take care of your cares?

Prove me wrong. The only way you are going to do that is by living and applying what God's Word says. I guarantee you, you will not be able to prove what I am preaching wrong, unless you decide to back down and grab that garment into your possession again so you can wear it or deal with it. See if your way gets you any further in whatever that care is for you. Let Jesus have it is what I am trying to say. He will take care of it. Keep standing and coming against the lies and deceptions that the devil wants you to believe. Show some humility and say, "Lord, it's yours. I'm here to serve; I'm here to do what you want me to do. When these problems and circumstances come around, because I'm your willing servant, you promised you would solve them." He will.

Just don't take my word for it. Prove God's Word. I guarantee, His Word comes out on top every single time.

To be continued. . . .

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